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THRUST winter/spring 1982
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SCIENCE FICTION IN REVIEW

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THRUST

ISSN 0198-6686

no.18

SCIENCE FICTION IN REVIEW

THRUST-SCIENCE FICTION IN REVIEW, issue number 18, Winter/Spring 1982. ISSN: 0198-6686. Published two times per year, January and July, by Thrust Publications, 8217 Langport Terrace, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877, U.S.A. Telephone: (301) 948-2514.

Subscriptions: Subscriptions are available, six issues for \$9.00 in North America, and six issues for \$11.00 elsewhere. Single copies are \$1.95 each in North America, \$2.25 elsewhere. Please make all checks payable to Thrust Publications, in U.S. dollars only. All subscriptions will begin with the next available issue. To have subscription start with present issue send first class, add 50¢. Institutional subscriptions (only) will be billed monthly.

Back issues: Issues number 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 are available directly from Thrust Publications for \$1.95 each, or four for \$6.50, or eight for \$12.00 in North America, and \$2.25 each, or six for \$12.00 elsewhere.

Advertising: Display advertising rates are available upon request from Thrust Publications. Classified ads are 15¢ per word per issue, minimum 20 words. For classified ads, payment must accompany copy. Deadlines are December 1 for the Winter/Spring issue and June 1 for the Summer/Fall issue.

Wholesale Rates: Issues of *Thrust* are available at wholesale rates of 40% off (minimum: 15 copies) from Thrust Publications, 8217 Langport Terrace, Gaithersburg, MD 20760. Standing orders are encouraged. *Thrust* is also available from the following Distributors:

F&S Book Company, Inc., P.O. Box 415, Staten Island, NY 11204.

Seagate Distributors, Inc., 657 Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11215.

Submissions: Unsolicited submissions, including articles, reviews and artwork, are welcomed when accompanied by return postage. However, the publisher accepts no responsibility for unsolicited materials. All letters will be treated as publishable unless expressly otherwise requested.

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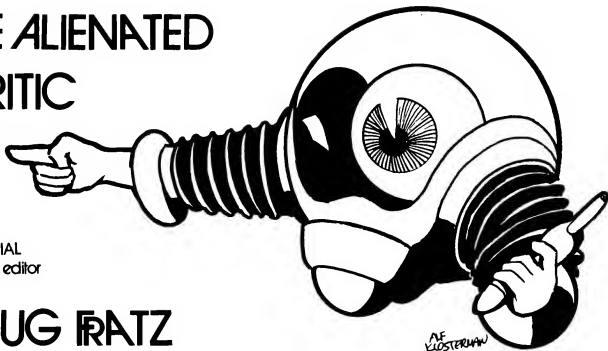
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THE ALIENATED CRITIC

AN
EDITORIAL
by the editor

DOUG RATZ



New issues of *Thrust* have become extremely rare of late. It therefore gives me special pleasure to welcome you to the latest of that seemingly endangered species, *Thrust* #18.

Around The Clock? Since publishing *Thrust* #17, I have decided to get a bit more education. In September of 1981, I began night classes and plan to get a Masters Degree in Environmental Science in the Summer of 1983. Due to the lesser amount of time I know have to work on *Thrust*, I have elected (as those of you who habitually read colophons already know) to reduce the frequency of this magazine from three issues per year to two issues per year. I am hoping this change will free up a few hours a week for attending classes, reading textbooks, writing papers, taking tests, and other such scholarly pursuits.

Most of my friends and relatives, upon hearing that I planned to add a Masters program to my already extensive workload of *Thrust* and a very fulltime career, thought me somewhat insane. But I look forward to seeing just how much I am capable of accomplishing and what the true limit of my endurance really is. If I can do this without having a nervous breakdown, I shall forever more be fearless in the face of mindnumbing workloads!

Taking My Losses: As the more astute business minds among you may have inferred, if time was my only problem, I'd hire someone. *Thrust* has never been a big money-maker, and it's improving only slowly. I was surprised that the Hugo nomination in 1980 didn't really provide the turning point I'd hoped it would.

Surprisingly, over the last year or so bankruptcies have taken quite a toll. When the grand death of *Galileo/Galaxy* took Offset Distributors along with it, I lost nearly \$300. I lost of \$100 when Dark They Were And Golden Eyed, a London sf bookstore of long-standing, went under last year. And I heard a few months ago that Hourglass Books in Philadelphia went out of business, owing me about \$40. The nonpayment rate on wholesale *Thrusts* has always been more than 25%, but the last year or so has been ridiculous!

I have no intention of taking the same escape route that Paul Allen took with *Fantasy Newsletter*, however—for one thing, I could never stand to see someone else editing *Thrust*. For another, I think science fiction needs a magazine like *Thrust*, and I value my opinion very highly.

The Thrust Awards: Elsewhere in this issue you will find the final ballot for the *First Annual Thrust Awards*, the only series of

sf awards to ask the equally important question: what have we done wrong this year? We now have more than enough awards and polls on the best or favorite material produced in SF each year. But the situation is as if we published only rave reviews of the recognized best books each year. We cannot develop an adequate critical view of the science fiction year with statistics only on what works represented the favorites of various readerships or viewerships. How about the least favorite works? A balanced view is needed to judge the direction of the science fiction field.

There are, of course, numerous problems with attempting to give awards for the worst of something. It can legitimately be considered cruel to choose individual SF works—almost certainly the work of a single individual—as the worst of its kind for a whole year. Additionally, the bell-curve of sf work versus quality leans considerably towards the low end on quality and there are therefore a lot more books competing for a "worst" award; and it can also be noted that many bad SF books and movies are obviously so, and therefore do not even get read or viewed.

I believe, however, that I have worked around all of the problems inherent to this type of poll or award. (Although this is really a poll, I'm calling it "The Thrust Awards" because it sounds better.) This sort of award is far from unprecedented in the mainstream literary world; *The American Spectator* still confers the *J. Gordon Coogler Award* for the worst book of the year, fiction and non-fiction.

The major category in The Thrust Awards is not worst novel, but "Most Disappointing Novel". This book needn't be the worst of the year, or for that matter even be a bad book, but only must fall well below expectations—expectations created by the author's talent or past record, publishers' promotion, or even critical acclaim. Likewise, the other fiction category is "Most Disappointing Collection", the short fiction award. The categories are "Least Favorite Magazine" and "Worst Dramatic Presentation".

The rules are simple: only *Thrust* subscribers are eligible to vote, and all subscribers voting will get one free back issue of *Thrust*, their choice. I hope you'll all vote. Next issue I'll announce the winners and describe the nominations system to be used for future years.

..... cont. on pg. 26

By Chance, Out of Conviction

by
D.G. COMPTON



With Dr. Jeffrey M. Elliot

Asked recently to supply a title to a piece about my science fiction work, I came up in desperation with the phrase: "By Chance, Out of Conviction." Apart from its horsey associations which didn't fit at all, it seemed apt. So I offered it then and I'm offering it again now as a summary of my position. Total chance got me into science fiction, but once I was there I found it suited my temperament and convictions exactly.

Temperament and convictions — well, temperament obviously grows out of heredity and upbringing, and convictions grow out of what one makes of these. So, to begin with, a brief parental note.

In a word, estranged. Estranged from each other and estranged from me — an actress mother whom I saw only rarely, and an actor father whom I saw not at all. Of my father, therefore, I can say nothing, except that he presumably didn't much like children. My mother, who didn't much like children either, was a woman of formidable presence and middling theatrical talent, with a pleasant singing voice and an abrasive wit. I inherited none of these. If she passed anything on to me, it was an almost pathological dread of anything that might be termed sentimental.

I was brought up from the age of one by her mother, a stiff but generous-spirited Scotswoman who had embraced widowhood, like Queen Victoria, in her early 40s and never wore anything but black thereafter, and by that most middle-class of menaces, a nanny. Between them, and this was in the '30s and '40s, these two women established a powerfully Victorian matriarchal household. Grandmother was the intelligent, compassionate one, but it was Nanny who stayed with me, in every sense, till I was 20.

My childhood was secure, over-praised, happy. The same adjectives could be applied to my education, as a day pupil, at a minor British public school. Often, reading other British writers' accounts of their public school sufferings, my own easy passage seems to me a sign of great personal inadequacy! Surely my writer's questing soul, if I'd had one, would have rebelled at the oppressive formality, at the already obsolete assumptions as to an Englishman's place in the world, and at the preposterous belief in cold showers as a panacea for all adolescent ills? For certainly even then, though the questing soul might have been absent, there was no doubt in my mind that a writer was what I was going to be. I had known this, in fact, ever since some repellent poem about snowdrops when I was nine, greatly admired by Nanny, and nothing in my school career served to warn me otherwise.

Possibly I was lucky. The war was on, and staff shortages brought back from retirement a number of excellent elderly gentlemen who perhaps lacked stamina for the instilling of a proper Public School Spirit. Also, we were blessed with an unsuitably enlightened headmaster who dressed us in boiler suits as a sensible response to clothes rationing, and even spoke of things like student democracy. (It is presumably indicative of the uphill battle he had that a few years later he quit the British system and went to teach in a multiracial

school in Africa.)

Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that I cruised through school in a state of wholly agreeable euphoria. My classwork was adequate, I rowed and played enough rugger to satisfy the playing-fields-of-Eton bit, and for the rest I was contentedly establishing myself as a literary person. I did school magazine pieces and, more particularly, end-of-term plays. After all — and I passed through a period of inordinate pride at this — my mother was an actress...

So my future was mapped out. I was to be a writer and, more particularly, a writer of plays — partly on account of that actress mother, partly because poems about snowdrops had been discovered to be distinctly un-chic, but mostly for the obvious reason that plays were shorter than books, and therefore easier to write. Can idleness be inherited? If so, then one of other of my parents bequeathed me an excess of it.

A heredity, then, of unsentimentality, of some vague sort of association with the arts, and of idleness. And an upbringing of indulgence and anachronistic respectability. (My mother's real charm lay for me in her brazen sinfulness: she was known to go, alone, into public houses.) And these two, heredity and upbringing, resulted in a temperament of remoteness, artistic pretension, and terribly British decency that I've been fighting ever since.

National Service, 18 months of which was compulsory for all young men back in 1948, denied my remoteness but failed to destroy it. A peacetime conscript army is boarding school gone mad: formality, obsolete assumptions, cold showers, all carried to irrational, sadistic lengths. As a response, perhaps, a novel got started, but it never progressed beyond the statutory first three chapters. It was all about a conscientious objector with what I can look back on now as a highly unnatural affection for his cat — the conscientious objector as an expression of my dislike of what the army was doing to me at that time, and the cat as an expression of my backwardness with young women, whom I'd never met — and it faded out when I was transferred to a psychiatric hospital where the making of a radio-controlled model boat seemed far more attractive.

One of the advantages of the British one-sex public school system, I believe, used to be that it prolonged a boy's childhood until his 18th year — often, in fact, until his 80th year, but that's something else again. National Service, although he learnt a lot of new rude words in it, arrested his development yet further, so that most of us left the services, at 20, still children. Certainly I did.

And was flung thereafter, totally unprepared, into the real world. Well, a real world...

University had already been ruled out — if I was to be a playwright, so my reasoning went, then the sooner I got down to the business of writing plays the better. But then my mother intervened. Her view of me down the previous 20 years I had never dared ask — she was, as I have said, a formidable if infrequent visitor — but she showed herself now to have no opinion whatsoever of my ability to earn my living as a play-

wright. Neither was she willing, as my grandmother might have been, to let me swim around for a while, belatedly discovering my own limitations. So she shanghaied me into the only profession she knew: the theater. I would never make an actor, she said: for one thing, I was too tall; and for another, she'd seen me in several school productions. I stammered badly too, but that, curiously enough, had been the least of my acting deficiencies. Anyway, interviews were arranged, pressure was applied, and I quickly found myself an assistant stage manager instead, in a tiny provincial repertory company.

Having brought up (!) my stammer, now is perhaps the time to get it over and done with. It should really have been mentioned sooner, since it was almost certainly the most powerful single influencing factor in my life. A stammer is a dreadful nuisance to all concerned. But one cannot help concluding that the barrier to communication it raises between the stammerer and others is at least in some measure self-taught. If you really do not want contact, how reassuring it must be not to be able to have it. The argument could be carried further and a connection found with the large number of writers, remote people often, who have stammered: Lewis Carroll, Arnold Bennett, Ronald Firbank, Somerset Maugham, Elizabeth Bowen, to name just the first five who come to mind. A similar list from the other arts would be hard to assemble. . . so did they write because they couldn't talk, or did they not rather stammer because they'd prefer to write? It's a dangerous simplification, obviously — but it's indicative of something that my own stammer virtually went away about ten years ago when the fortunate coincidence of a happy second marriage and some writerly success made it unnecessary.

The remoteness lingers, though. Forty-year habits are hard to shake off.

Stammer or no, I loved my life in that repertory company: the pose of it all, the world-within-a-world, the nightly glory, the whole fantasy-feeding shangha. Plus the fact that I could tell myself I was being prepared in the best possible way for future playwright-hood. I even began to see plays in a new light, from the point of view of the stage stuff. I determined that Act One of my next play would end with ten bottles of beer being opened on stage, the entire cast then having to hurry off for a complete costume change before Act Two. Assistant stage managers were thirsty people.

My theater career was short, however, for I soon fell deliciously in love with the wife of the stage director and she, poor soul, with me. Exit assistant stage manager and stage director's wife, hurriedly. And such was the intensity of our shared delirium that the maturing of a small insurance policy on my 21st birthday convinced us both that now was the moment for me to fulfill all my delayed playwrighting ambitions.

In retrospect once again, I imagine that the real attraction of the scheme was the romantic cottage of a Cornish fishing village (the gift of my stiff but generous-spirited grandmother) that came with it.

My mother, having done her once-and-for-all best, had washed her hands of the whole affair.

Cornwall was nice. The children, though — one of hers and very shortly one of ours — cried a lot and were rather less nice. (I was far from nice myself.) And my wife, stuck with the three of us, became utterly, if understandably, horrible. But worst of all was the quaintly-beamed attic, with a view of the harbor, where I was supposed to do my writing.

Up there I was daily brought face to face — I did go up daily, for the first few months — with the realization that there was more to writing plays than putting pretty words on a page, or even arranging for beer bottles to be opened at opportune moments. There was also more to it than neatly turned plots. I was quite good at neatly turned plots — but there was still all that space between exposition and denouement to be filled in somehow. In short, one had to have something to write about. . . And further, one had to have something one wanted to write about.

I was 21. I had precious little of the first, and nothing whatsoever of the second.

So I packed it in. My first little act in 21 years.

We'd lasted 18 months in Cornwall, first on my insurance policy and then on making lampshades and raffia bags to sell to the occasional holiday-maker — those were the days before tourists had been invented. But by then our family was on the brink of being increased to three — it's sad the way people still breed, even when they don't really like each other — so we returned to London. I got an office job, and we lived in a houseboat on the Thames.

A few boats along on the mooring another playwright lived. I didn't resent him because he was just as unsuccessful as I, and even poorer. His name was John Osborne. I'm glad to say he moved away before the opening night of **Look Back in Anger**, otherwise I might have crept out at dead of night and vengefully scuppered his moldering hulk under him.

I worked in the bedding department of a famous London furniture store, where I learned that the best mattresses were filled with the curled manes of white Argentinian horses, and that elderdown came from the arctic nests of the elder duck, one small handful gathered from each nest. She'd tweaked every wisp from her own bosom, so it was hardly surprising the stuff was so expensive. I learned also that Dodie Smith, a '30s playwright of **Dear Octopus** fame, had worked in the store before me, so I was in good company.

Later I managed a small furniture factory out in the suburbs, making hi-fi cabinets — by "managed" I mean I assembled the cabinets, polished them, delivered them, and dealt with the inevitable complaints. In short, I was the factory.

And so on. Jobs, domestic strife, moves, move jobs . . . until finally we landed up in rural Devon, pregnant again, and working as a door-to-door salesman — it was a confused time, and I wasn't always sure which of us was which. But it was then that the worm, of which we were the opposite ends, turned.

Clearly I was unfitted to the world of commerce. Equally clearly, my wife was unfitted to be the helpmate of a man working in a world to which *he* was unfitted. So we changed the world. We sold our cottage, rented another, and I set up as a playwright on the balance. It helped me enormously. But what the resulting destitution did for her is best veiled in ellipsis. . .

I was a playwright again. I'd come full circle, even to the cottage which — if not in a romantic Cornish fishing village — was in the next best thing, a romantic Devon muddy field. But there was a difference. I was ten years older, and ten years wiser.

Not that the difference, even as far as my writing was concerned, was immediately apparent. Though I did in truth have a few more things to write about, and wanted to write about them, nobody seemed willing to pay out good money for the results. The radio plays — I was writing for radio now because I had become more realistic about my chances of a West End production — flowed steadily from my pen, dropped into the deep dark well of the BBC, and were spat back at me after painfully long intervals. Once I was summoned to London — Peter Sellers might be interested in one of my scripts, they'd be in touch. We lived on that hope, dogging the postman, for nearly a year.

Funds ran out. The British welfare state took over, helped out by occasional work in a nearby dockyard. Perhaps I wasn't, after all, destined to be a playwright. Perhaps I wasn't destined to be anything-wright.

I turned to crime. The old joke is that crime doesn't pay. Well, it didn't — or at least, only a hundred pounds a book, but even that was better than the poke in the eye with a wet stick that I'd got used to. And one thing those six crime novels did show me was that the greater length of a book need be no serious deterrent. One simply began at the beginning and after a while one reached the end. Still, those novels hardly seemed a fulfillment of my writerly destiny — there was little room in them for all those things I now wanted to write about — and anyway, at a hundred pounds a time the wolf was still unpleasantly audible on the doorknob.

It was then, miraculously, that German radio discovered me — or rather, my mountainous backlog of BBC rejects. And suddenly I ate. We all ate. Not lavishly, but well enough for my crime novel publisher and me to part, with no great expres-

sions of regret on either side. This left me with a newly discovered disposition to write books and nothing to do with it.

We had moved to a village by this time, and were house-sitting for two very generous friends, the poets Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath. It would be presumptuous to suggest that some residue of their prodigious creativity lingered there and rubbed off on me. I did get an idea in their house though, an idea for a book that was to point me in a totally new direction.

This was 1963, and the news of a worldwide population explosion had just about reached Devon. How convenient it would be, I thought, and how ultimately beneficent, if that 10 percent of people who, like me, had *resus* negative blood could be quietly killed off — this being the fairest basis of selection I could devise. From this first notion it was only a short step to imagine enlightened world governments secretly practicing such a culling technique as a way of buying humanity time in which to sort out its problems. And from this it was an even shorter step to wonder how such a program could be devised, and what sort of cover story governments would think up to tell the ordinary decent guys who had to carry it out. . . . The end of all this speculation found me with a nice British air force officer responsible for the deaths of millions who was desperately trying, for his own peace of mind, to believe the story he'd been fed, while his wife desperately tried to make him accept the hideous truth.

I described this idea to my wife, who said it was vile, so I sat down at once and wrote the book. No — that's cheap. Mostly I respected her literary judgment. But I'd have written this particular book, whatever she'd said. It interested me. I believed in it and I sympathized with its characters.

Which is how, by chance but out of conviction, I became a science fiction writer.

When the book was finished, I called it **The Quality of Mercy** — you know, "which droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven" — and sent it off to Hodder and Stoughton in London. To my surprise they accepted it. They even paid me 250 pounds for it. And they asked me if I'd mind if they marketed it as science fiction. I told them I wouldn't — for 250 pounds they could market it as fish and chips if they felt so inclined. . . . Not that I had any clear idea of what science fiction was. There were gaudy magazines, weren't there, with rockets and girls in brass bras on their covers? But there was H.G. Wells also, who was really quite respectable. And anyway, my book had an identity of its own, quite apart from either of those two extremes, so I certainly wasn't going to get hung up over a label.

Around the time, also, a worrying thing had happened: my supply of radio play-shaped ideas had dried up. I had a job by then as a part-time village postman (4:30 a.m. to 9:00) and another as a bank guard two days a week, but even these two hardly produced a living wage. So Hodder and Stoughton's 250 pounds soon went, and I was broke again.

Hodder's were very understanding. They offered to pay me 30 pounds a month for three years, by way of advance royalties, in exchange for three more science fiction novels. Was I interested? I did a quick sum: 30 pounds a month, multiplied by 12 months, came to 360 pounds a year, and all for just one book, I was interested. And besides, I had to do something with my time, now that I was no longer writing all those radio plays.

The only trouble was, my next idea for a book concerned a man's need for a rigid framework to his life, and the stringent circumstances under which I judged he would be happiest. Now, I had no idea that Utopias were part of science fiction's common currency. But I did know that science fiction was often concerned with outer space. So all I had to do was place my ideal society on Mars. Nothing to it — I was in business again — characters, story, theme, the whole glorious kit of parts.

More science fiction books, and better ones I think, followed. It seemed, in fact, that my subconscious idea machine had only to be pointed in the right direction, the innocent, my-impression-of-what-science-fiction-was direction, and out came roughly the right sort of thing. I acquired an American publisher, and then another. In Britain too, pub-

lishers came and went. There were hard times inevitably, there still are, but I was writing steadily and, sooner or later, I was getting read. And in the process I gradually discovered the enormous side benefits of the genre I had chanced upon: its vociferously well-informed readership and the sense of community this engenders.

If I've gone into the births of my first two science fiction books in some detail, that's not because they're particularly significant in themselves. But the way they happened, by chance, out of conviction, set a pattern that has been followed ever since.

In the various fastnesses I've inhabited since those Devon days, matters of pressing concern have regularly, if belatedly, filtered through to me. 1968's awareness of the drug culture helped along my book **Synthajoy**. 1969's worries about scientific responsibility started me on **The Steel Crocodile**. 1972's controversies over intrusions on individual privacy produced **The Unsleeping Eye**. . . . Always the same pattern, the initial external science fictionish notion, followed by its intimate application to the lives of people: people I could believe in and sympathize with. And if I could believe in them and sympathize with them, and therefore be interested in them, then I had to hope that readers would do so too.

There are exceptions to the pattern, of course. **Ascendancies** and its people came to me entire, in a single flash: a story about fear and ways of coping with it that was suggested by a line in a play on TV, something about the possibility that the Gods were only playing with us. **Windows**, on the other hand, simply grew out of my curiosity, an irresistible need to find out what had happened to the people in the book before it. But even in these exceptions, the main pressure on me has always been the same: to remind myself that, whatever worlds may be created, real or fictional, we still have to take ourselves along with us into them.

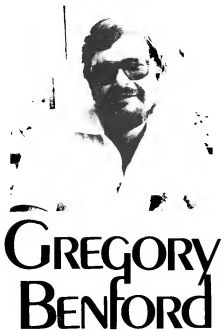
I believe this is a concern proper to science fiction. Whether I've articulated it very well is another matter. Admittedly I'm no scientist, and this is a severe handicap. But the "science" in my stories has always been a metaphor for something else. If I write science for any one single reason, it's that I find looking at tomorrow a useful way of getting new perspectives on today.

And that temperament I've been fighting? All that remoteness, artistic pretension, and terribly British decency? Well, my presence in science fiction is a healthy sign that the battle continues. On the losing side, science fiction enables me to express conviction while at the same time dodging commitment: since the situations I write about are speculative, not quite "real," I can care about them passionately without ever having to come very close. On the credit side, I do my best to deal with the pretension bit by subordinating it (if only with limited success) to the salutary demands of a literature with a wide, intelligent, but strictly non-nonsense readership. And as to the conflict centered round my British decency, the outcome is still to be decided.

My attitudes, basically, are un-decent. I admit that I don't much like today's world, and it's unlikely that I would have liked yesterday's, or the day before that's, very much better. Yet I am convinced that I myself, the world, the flesh, and the devil, we're all the same thing, and I am equally convinced of the writer's duty to demonstrate, and celebrate, this fact. So I try to do the decent thing but not — and I hope I make myself clear — to do it "decently": anger isn't "decent," neither is love, and they're my main objects. . . . And if that's an artistic pretension, then there's something to be said, after all, for artistic pretension.

Recently, in the continuing assault on temperament, my wife and I have come to live in the United States. She is an American herself, and I've learned from her that there is nowhere on earth that is more opposed than this country to my main ingredients. America is in every way a magnificently excessive country, and with any luck it will rattle me up a bit. So, to paraphrase my old school song: *Foreat! Foreat! Foreat Americana!*

INTERVIEW:



GREGORY BENFORD

by Pascal J. Thomas

Thrust: For a start, you could tell us how you started in science fiction. I believe you first had some fan activities...

Benford: That's right. I was a science fiction fan from the age of about twelve, in the sense that I had been reading SF for five years before I got interested in fandom, as it's called, specifically in the publishing of fanzines and writing for them. And over a period of ten years I published and wrote for fanzines, using mostly a humorous or an essay style. By the age of sixteen, I had already begun to be rather more interested in science. About then I decided, I would say, that the science was more important to me than any particular interest in anything else, and notably writing. Even so, I liked to write a good deal. And so I pursued a scientific career. I went to the university in physics in 1959, received my bachelor's degree in 1963, and I went to California, to the University of California, and I studied for a doctorate in theoretical physics. In my first year in graduate school, I was working very hard and as pure relaxation, just on impulse, I began to write fiction. I wrote it at a slow rate, and it was not very good; then after a while I decided I would write some science fiction. Then I sold a story to *Fantasy and Science Fiction* in 1965, in my second year of graduate school, and kept writing as a hobby, while I developed my scientific career. I got my doctorate in 1967, I went to the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory, I worked on controlled thermonuclear fusion for four years. I then left there and went to the University of California at Irvine. I began as an assistant professor in 1971, two years later was an associate professor, and last year, in 1979, became a full professor. I have had a research career in mathematical physics, plasma physics and astrophysics. And all along I have been more and more interested in writing. It has never taken more than... I would say, 15% of my time. But this 15%, or 20%, is the amount of time that one would spend on a hobby. I intend to keep writing essentially as a hobby. I think it is a rather dangerous full-

time profession. It seems to have distorting effects on one's life. It's no secret that many writers are alcoholics or have turbulent emotional lives and fitful periods of depression. I don't want any of those, of course.

Thrust: So that's why you never attempted to become a full-time writer, even though you could, in terms of income...

Benford: Yes, easily. But I don't think I would prefer to be a full-time writer. I know I would not. I am more interested in the interplay between art and life than in tying myself to a typewriter and making myself a full-time expressor of thoughts and emotions. The thing is, you have to have time to experience. I'm experiencing when I just work in the real world, and specifically I work in the scientific world, because it is a fascinating place. It's not as though I was selling shoes for a living. So there is a lot of contrast in my life. My science is very mathematical, analytical and sometimes very abstract, in the sense that it's about extra-galactic objects, and the newer edge of things in physics, which are pulsar and plasma physics, and so on... But on the other hand I have often worked with intuition in my writing, not analytically. I typically write slowly, coming back to an idea again and again. Sometimes, I publish a short story, and then only five or six years later realize that it is related to another story and they all fit together as part of a novel. I have used that technique several times, because I never start out knowing what I'm working on. I often think that I'm working on a short story when in fact it becomes part of a novel. But it does have an independent life as a short story for a few years. My approach is usually intuitive. I can only describe works in retrospect. When I am working on them I cannot understand them.

Thrust: Do you think that science had a rather positive influence on your writing, or was it sometimes more of a hindrance? For instance, it requires a lot of work and may have prevented you from putting all the time you may have wanted into writing, especially during your graduate years.

Benford: Certainly. There is always a time conflict. But you cannot do mathematical physics ten hours a day, and you cannot write ten hours a day. They are too difficult and too high-energy activities to do full time. But I have a lot of energy, so I do both of them full time, so to speak. Nonetheless, my life gets awfully crowded because I have a lot of interests. I like athletics...

Thrust: And do you think your specialized work in science was a help for writing science fiction? Because, as I understand it, most of the science you need for science fiction is general things, the kind of stuff you learn in college, or that you can get through magazines...

Benford: Yes, most of it is. But it does not have to be that way. I have begun using more and more of my personal scientific interest in my science fiction. I began writing stories in which I would use general astronomical information. But for example in *The Ocean of Night*, I used some of my experience with NASA and with the space program, with astronomy, and a number of my own personal experiences, and put them all into a narrative about an astronaut and his career. In my most recent novel, *Timescape*, I specifically used material I had done research on, tachyon and astrophysics, and tried to blend it all together with a number of other themes; I think it was only because I was intimately acquainted with the scientific ideas that I could extrapolate from them and see new combinations. The strategy of the book is to say "Let me have one new fact — that tachyons exist. What are the theoretical implications? What are the implications for its use — you might say, the 'engineering' use?..." Most science fiction is in fact engineering fiction. It is about the construction of large artifacts, or methods of exploration of space — fields in which bigger is almost always thought to be better. And this is a noble tradition, all the way from John W. Campbell and George O. Smith onward, but it's not my interest. The

category of true *science fiction* — fiction about science and how it affects civilization — is a very much smaller category, and I don't think it will ever get much larger either, because it is difficult to write. I have not always written this pure, scientific kind of science fiction, but *Timescape* certainly is, in that it is about an alteration in our scientific ideas, and how this is realized in stages. I think that you gain something from the economy of just making one assumption in a book. Of course, everyone likes wild flights of imagination. On the other hand, everyone likes well worked-out possible futures. There are different aesthetic satisfactions in each one of these. But increasingly, now, I think I prefer a very constrained assumption and a narrative based on that assumption.

Thrust: Yes, *Timescape* is a very realistic novel which deals with the real working life of scientists, and that's one of the most realistic I have seen in that domain. And of course there you used your life experience as a scientist, and I suppose as a student.

Benford: Yes. In this real sense, you see how mainstream novelists have it relatively easy. It is in some ways very much easier to write directly from life than it is to write from your imagination. You gain being specific — you gain all kinds of little details and interrelations which ordinarily you would have to have great insight to see; but if you've just experienced it, then there it is. And so I was happy to write most of the book actually set in our past — that is, *my* past.

Thrust: Yes. Actually, it started out being a short story, and you added to it the whole part about California in the past, and it's sometimes even nostalgic.

Benford: That's right. The entire California motif is of course the other side of the attempt to send a message backward in time. And for various strategic reasons in the novel I had to use a location in 1962 and 63, and the only place I knew at the time was my graduate school, which luckily was exactly right for the use of the book.

Thrust: Because there was such an experiment being conducted at the time?

Benford: Oh yes. I worked on it. A nuclear magnetic resonance experiment. And everyone mentioned in the background of the book is real. All the relationships are real, even the room numbers are right. Only people who speak lines of dialogue are "false". And even some of them are not. Freeman Dyson approved the portions of the book featuring him, and so on...

Thrust: How did you come to collaborate with Gordon Eklund?

Benford: I was leaving for a university appointment, I had an idea, and I suggested to him that he work on it, because I did not have enough time to write. And I found it useful to have someone to talk to and communicate back and forth with. I ended up writing a fair amount of the book, but it was useful to collaborate in order to clarify ideas. I found that occasionally useful, though perhaps a decade of my career, but I think I will never do it again now, because I think I don't need to.

Thrust: You've had quite a long history of collaborating with him; I mean, a prior to this he didn't strike me as someone who is very close to you in terms of style... or content.

Benford: That's true. But we were good friends and we have now written two novels and several short stories together. I actually ended up writing more than half of *Find the Changeling*, our second book. Basically it was a time-saving notion, in most cases, because I did not have much time then. And it seemed a useful maneuver. I was intensely aware of the fact that I needed to learn how to write fiction. The one thing you learn as a scientist is that you must master the technique. You spend much time on technique. Writers are often so full of talent or ideas that they neglect technique. But I was more systematic, I saw intuitively that I needed to work in that area. And so I just knew I had to serve an apprenticeship. And it occurred to me that it might be

better to serve it by learning from someone who was also learning.

Thrust: Your first stories were sort of astronaut stories — I read the first one of *F&SF* — how did you come over to what at the time seemed to be the other end of the spectrum, what was called the New Wave?

Benford: I set out to learn how to write fiction, and the more I learned, the more I realized there were many techniques available for telling stories, and things I found I could not say in the story of "hard science", that I wanted to say, and I began to look for techniques that would teach me how to say it. I would run across them in literature, and that would influence me. I have been influenced by reading a lot of American and European writers and yet I came to all this as a virtual illiterate. I had never read most of the great novelists. I have not to this day read, say, Tolstoy... all kinds of things. I was so bent upon a scientific career that I took my literary courses by examination. I did the minimum amount of work, then I would write an essay and pass the course by examination. That actually proves that my internship in fandom may have done me damage, because it made me able to write at least at a level so that I could get through a literature course without reading literature. On the other hand, I can now read literature at the age at which I think you *should* come to it. I come to literature when I need it rather than having it forced into me at the age of eighteen.

Thrust: You know, I think this is a very common syndrome among scientists. I have the same syndrome except that... I'm still young, and I haven't gotten into literature yet. When I was talking about the New Wave, I was also talking about those stories which have more social and political content, much more than the classical hard science story. You also wrote stories about ecological concerns, which are usually thought of as opposed to the classical "hard science", technophilic views...

Benford: "Grey Technology" versus "Green Technology"?...

Thrust: For instance...

Benford: I tend to see all sciences as being relevant to the world, so I use whatever seems to apply to the problem. The most important thing is that in order to understand the world, you must use all your artillery; every science, every literary method, every insight you can gain into human beings and how they interact with their culture and each other. There is a tradition in American "pulp" writing, in which you write emotionally about a subject, in order to get people to feel about it. But the real trick of course is to write about a subject in such a way that people feel the emotion. Instead of announcing the emotion in the text, you provoke it in the reader. The first approach I would say is typically Harlan Ellison's approach; it is very different from the kind of approach I tend to use, which is the second. So I have to learn how to make that happen; and for my purposes, that is trying to write about science in a deep way, and in the way that scientists think about it. I have to break new ground sometimes — new to me, anyway. There are very few novels that have tried to treat this big territory. C.P. Snow understood people very well, but he was not very much of a dramatist. Some SF writers are good dramatists, but I don't think they understand the process of doing science well, or how scientists feel anything about it. Many people seem to believe that paradigm about scientific revolutions of Kuhn, and so on. I generally don't. I don't believe that scientific method is the way most science is done; that is, the classical layout of the scientific method. And so to write about this is both interesting to me, and new territory.

Thrust: As a scientist and as a writer, what do you think of the arrival on the scene of those magazines which stress more and more non-fiction articles, like *Omni* which is primarily a popular science magazine, or *Destines* which stresses these big "fictional engineering" articles?

Benford: More power to them! We need better understanding of science, and there are many ways of doing this, other than science fiction.

Thrust: So you think they do the job?

Benford: They do part of the job. Science fiction can do things that non-fiction simply cannot. Non-fiction has a difficult time conveying the enormous cleverness of the world. The emotions we get about the world are best seen through fiction, not through non-fiction, I think.

Thrust: You seem to have had in your novels a long string of characters, usually scientist types, more or less struggling against the bureaucracy above them; like Nigel Walsley in *In the Ocean of Night*, or Renfrew in *Timescape*, against Peterson...

Benford: Or Gordon Bernstein, also in *Timescape*, or Reynolds in *If the Stars are Gods*. . . That's true. I do tend to use men who are definitely in an organization, in a context, and have them struggle with the conflicts of having their own point of view, and yet surviving the real constraints of the system around them. Because that's what everyone does. Human experience is not like one lone person against the Universe. You are *always* in a context, and to me the interesting thing is the trade-off between your position in a hierarchy and your own individual vector. So I tend to use people who may sometimes be rebels, but everyone is a rebel, in something. Unless he is absolutely hopeless. And anyone who is interested enough in reading feels conflicts between what different organizations he belongs to say, and what his heart, or his mind, says.

Thrust: If somebody who is not a rebel is hopeless, I think there are a lot of people who are hopeless. . .

Benford: Well, that's true. I mean hopeless in the sense that they are not really alive.

Thrust: So you don't want to make them lead characters in a novel. . .

Benford: Well. . . There are kinds of rebellions, but there are people in my novels who are not very questioning of the system. It is certainly true I do question the system, one should always. But I am also aware of the fact that, fundamentally, change is best brought about gradually, inside the context of an existing institution. I think the metaphor of revolution has been the worst-abused of all in the 20th century. I don't think much of most of the 20th century revolutions. I think the idea of radical, sudden change, is less and less useful in a society which is characterized by greater and greater interconnections. Some would see this as pure sell-out and compromise by me, but it's just the result of filtered experience. I have seen many kinds of organizations. My father was on the staff of General MacArthur in the Korean War and he was a professional military figure, he retired as Commandant of the US Army Artillery School. I have seen the military, I have seen Academia, I have worked in business, and all of this comes out of a range of experiences. You see, I am not an enemy of large organizations, but I am a critic of them. Everyone should be.

Thrust: What kind of work did you do in business?

Benford: I worked three summers for Texas Instruments, designing things and doing production jobs. I worked for the Navy doing research for one summer. Also, I have been a consultant for scientific businesses for a decade.

Thrust: Do you have any kind of general political views, or do you just tackle things issue by issue? . . .

Benford: I cannot be put on the political spectrum. I hit issue by issue, and have fundamental premises, such as optimum liberty, economic and political, and basically a feeling that the job of the government is not to insure your life but to keep the bastards off your back.

Thrust: Could you specify?

Benford: I don't mean that I am the same as Heinlein in feeling that I want to minimize the number of impositions of others on me, but I do feel that the Welfare State can turn into the Farewell State. It can make people so

dependent upon it that it creates a class who are interested in the continuation of a Government, which stifles innovation and must control the economy in order to control its political base. My principal criticism of socialism, as it is usually described, is that it does not provide an economic buffer between the individual and the State. It does not have corrective mechanisms built in to isolate the individual enough from the State. Free Enterprise, as it's called, if it can be achieved, does. Of course it also has drawbacks — monopoly and inheritance. . . But my instinct is to trust a freer economic system, because I don't trust large units with all of my life. Also, I think socialism is rather inefficient, economically.

Thrust: Does that tie in with whatever experiences you may have had while living in Britain?

Benford: Yes. To me, England is very important. I am an Anglo-Saxon and I see England as an experiment. It is a halfway between America and Europe, metaphorically, and I think that I see in England things that are now afoot in America. Some good, some bad. And that was the prime strategy behind *Timescape*, and deliberately inverting several relationships in order to heighten the tension: England seems like a country of the past, so I used that as the future; California seems to be the cutting edge of the future, so I used it in the past.

Thrust: And that novel comes across sounding rather pessimistic about the future. . . as we know it.

Benford: It can be read that way, but in *Timescape* I simply write about the feelings we have right now, not in 1962 or 1998, about our past and our future. It's a book about our perceptions of ourselves and where we have been going, and the options we had. And the pervasive American feeling that things began to go wrong in the '60s, and have not been got right. That's an extremely important feeling people have. But I also wanted to capture in the background the sense of strangeness people have about science, and the dislocated view of science. And this strange view of Time: that it is really symmetric, and yet we experience it asymmetrically.

Thrust: The problems of the philosophy of science tie in in a very important way.

Benford: Yes. The book is pervaded by different kinds of feelings of being out of place, or out of time. That's not the same as standard *Angst* or *ennui* or alienation. The effect I try to achieve is different. It is really a constellation of emotions rather than one or two easy emotions. That is the way I feel about it, anyway. . .

Thrust: You have been living or traveling abroad quite extensively, and that shows. You seem to be less insular than many American writers — or many Americans for that matter. . . Did that help you to get a better view of really foreign characters?

Benford: Perhaps so. I lived three years in Japan, three years in Germany, and perhaps two years in other European countries, including England, Italy, France. . . I am interested in foreign people because they are different. They think differently, and they can be used in different ways. I have used Chinese and Japanese over and over again, I find it a fascinating culture. And it also means things to Americans. They can be used as signs to Americans. The same with Europeans.

Thrust: What are you going to be writing in the near and far future, as far as you can say?

Benford: I am working on a sequel to *In the Ocean of Night* called *Across the Sea of Suns*. I am also working on a novella, untitled. And I have an unnamed novel in progress beyond that. I also have a notion and notes for a novel (which probably would not be science fiction) about how science deals with genuinely startling new scientific facts. In a sense, it is the same strategy — in part — as *Timescape*. I would use one startling scientific fact.

Thrust: Which is actual? . . .

Benford: No, and so in some sense it is science fiction. But I

don't think I will couch it so that it's obviously science fiction.

Thrust: Again, *Timescape* has some of that aspect. I mean that it can be read as a mainstream novel.

Benford: Yes, the future there is represented differently than in most science fiction, and the relationships between people are taken to be more important and rather more subtle than in most of science fiction. Those are usually strategies of the mainstream novel.

Thrust: You are writing a sequel to *In the Ocean of Night*. Is it because you felt that it had more in it than you thought previously?

Benford: Yes. When I wrote it, I had no sequel in mind, but I began to think about the larger issues that the book raised and slowly saw that it would be necessary to work it out in an extended series of books, and it made more sense to keep the continuity.

Thrust: Is this going to deal with further contacts with the aliens?...

Benford: Yes it is. With the inherent conflict between organic and machine life.

Thrust: What are your feelings about the field of science fiction, and where it is going now?... or more generally "mainstream" literature?

Benford: I think science fiction of high quality is still having a

difficult time reaching a larger audience. There is enormous bias against it among the literary politicians, and the public has been hardened by a barrage of low-level science fiction. I don't buy the theory that science fiction will very soon make inroads in a larger public. Unless, say, these *Star Wars* fans mature in 20 years and provide that public. The reason for this, I think, is the vehement opposition to science fiction among the standard literary intellectuals — as long as it is *labeled* science fiction — and the unfortunate fact that we are economically constrained so that we do not have very many people with the time and the money to practice science fiction at a high level. Many more writers would write better if they could afford it.

Thrust: You mean that what is paid for a science fiction novel necessarily limits the quality of it?

Benford: Yes. That's why it's a great advantage to be a part-time writer.

Thrust: Although that limits your output.

Benford: True; but then you can think more about it. I spend at least five, and often ten years thinking about a novel and working on it. In the case of *Timescape* it was twelve. So... I work in that lapidary way. It's fun!

Thrust: Thank you, Dr. Benford.

THE THRUST AWARDS BALLOT: 1980-81

Rules of Eligibility: All books first released in 1980-81, all dramatic presentations premiering in 1980-81 and all magazines with one or more issues published during 1980-81. Only current subscribers to **Thrust-Science Fiction in Review** are eligible to vote. Voting will be tallied as follows: 5 points for first place votes, 4 for second place, 3 for third, 2 for fourth, and 1 for fifth place. All ballots must be received by April 31, 1982. Send to Thrust Publications, 8217 Langport Terrace, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877. All subscribers submitting completed ballots will receive one back issue of Thrust of his or her choice free.

Definitions of Categories: (1) **Most Disappointing Novel:** The SF or fantasy novel of 1980-81 whose quality fell most below that expected; expectations may be due to author's previous work, author's reputation, publisher's publicity, or even critical acclaim. (2) **Most Disappointing Short Fiction Collection:** The SF or fantasy short fiction collection, or anthology, original or reprint, published in 1980-81, whose quality fell most below that expected. (3) **Most Disappointing Magazine:** The SF/fantasy fiction magazine whose quality of fiction was most disappointing, taking into account budget constraints, previous history and other factors. (4) **Worst Dramatic Presentation:** The movie or other dramatic presentation of 1980-81 with a SF or fantasy theme which was the worst in terms of quality.

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FROM THE PICTURED URN



Charles Sheffield

Part 1: If you're so clever, how come you're not rich?

"How would you like to make a lot of money — a lot of money?" he said, and his eyes were gleaming.

I looked around me. It was a tempting question, but I have learned to be suspicious and I lowered my voice before I answered. "Doing what? I'm not the one for something illegal. I told you, I want to be a writer."

"You will be a writer. You could make a bundle of money, just writing."

"Writing science fiction? That's mostly what I read, and that's what I want to write." I took a cautious sip of beer.

He nodded. His tone was still patient and persuasive. "You'll be writing science fiction. Writing science fiction and making lots of legal cash."

"Look, I know my own limitations." I was still suspicious — you learn after a year or two to tell when something is just too good to be true. "I can write a decent English sentence, and I can handle a plot better than most. But I'm no literary sensation, and you've seen my reviews. They're nothing to write home about. So if you're going to tell me that all I have to do is write masterpieces —"

"Would I do a thing like that?" He leaned across the table and put his hand over mine. The black pointed fingernails squeaked on the wood as he closed his grip, gentle but firm. "It's nothing like that. There's no catch, and you won't need to write any better than you've been writing for the past three years. You'll write science fiction, and you'll have millions of readers, your books will be in the libraries, the money will be rolling in."

"How much will I have to write? I mean, if it's one of these three-books-a-month deals..." I shrugged. "I can't produce the way Silverberg did."

"Two books a year, maximum — let's say, a hundred thousand words?" He released my hand and leaned back in his chair. "I don't want to rush you on this. Take your time and think about it. I've got all night."

I thought about it. Wealth, fame, an sf reputation without overworking. If there was a catch, I couldn't see it. I finally nodded.

"Good." He reached into a pocket of his red waistcoat. "It's all settled, then. If you'll just sign here..."

One of my favorite moments in movies occurs in "Bedazzled", when Peter Cooke as the Devil is busy angling for Dudley Moore's soul. At one point they go into an old lady's cottage and help themselves to a meal. When they sit down to eat, Peter Cooke pulls an enormous spoon from inside his shirt and gives it to Dudley Moore to use on his food. "Who sups with the Devil..." — but the great point was this: *the proverb was never mentioned.*

The long spoon wasn't enough to protect poor old Dudley, who never did get his hands on Eleanor Bron. To beat the Devil you need a very long spoon. And if you get the girl, she may not be what you imagined.

This train of thought began about three months ago, when I received a packet of free books. Somewhere within the publishing houses sits an entity (I pray that computers are used, and not people) that decides how free books are to be given out to writers. Perhaps they are review copies. Perhaps, since publishers are known as generous and large-hearted people, they are sent merely to give pleasure. In any event, anyone who writes and publishes gets these gift packages from time to time, based on some primitive psychological profile of the intended recipient.

I wonder about my perceived psychological profile. In my packet were the following:

The Selected Writings of Samuel Johnson (1 copy)

The Girl in A Swing, by Richard Adams (1 copy)

Rogue of Gor, by John Norman (2 copies)

That was the first data point.

The second data point was provided by my local public library. I went in there to look at William Dement's book, "Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep" (a free plug here for the most fascinating book imaginable on the psychology and physiology of sleep, a text I keep meaning to buy and never do) and on the way out I took a look at the SF section. There I found the following titles:

Tribesmen of Gor; Beasts of Gor; Explorers of Gor; Slave Girl of Gor; Marauders of Gor; Fighting Slave of Gor; and Hunters of Gor.

All well-thumbed, all under the DAW SF imprint, and about five copies of each title. Assuming that the books checked out from the shelves are in the same general proportions as the ones remaining on the shelves, the Bethesda Public Library has more John Norman than Robert Heinlein, more than Arthur Clarke, more than Isaac Asimov, far more than Herbert or Bradbury. It would be tempting and consoling to argue that these other authors were absent because their works were out on loan to a discerning public, whereas the Gor books sit neglected on the shelves. I don't believe that, and I think my third data point supports my view.

It came when I went into the Moonstone Bookbazaar in downtown Washington. Among the new books displayed was "Feminists of Gor"; or whatever the ninety-ninth volume in the Gor saga is called. I pointed it out to the lady behind the counter, and she nodded gloomily. "I know," she said. "I don't like them, but they sell so well. Worst of all, I hear teenagers who recommend them to their friends, and say they are the best thing they have ever read."

At this point you may have decided that the rest of the article will be devoted to attacking a safe target, the equivalent of shooting sitting ducks or fish in a barrel. Read to the end before you draw that conclusion.

Part 2: "Reverend, is it wrong to look at naked women?"

"Sure it is, otherwise we'd all be doin' it."

The Gor books, like Nancy Reagan's black baby, are one of life's little mysteries. They are stocked in the libraries, and in numerous bookstores. Yet you will never meet anybody who has read one. A chapter or two is all anyone ever admits to, and that only for putting the works down. The science content of these "science fiction" books is nil; their literary merit is negligible; their repetition is ubiquitous at all levels from the paragraph to the book to the series. And they sell hundreds of thousands of copies of every new title.

I believe that the Gor books make a fundamental statement about science fiction and the SF readership.

Since I must assume that you have not read the works in question (after all, no one has) perhaps a brief extract from one of them is appropriate before I go on. So:

She lay on the floor in front of him. She was nude, and bowed forward by the weight of the heavy collar. The white-hot brand came steadily nearer to her thigh as she wriggled beneath the candlelit foot that pressed her firmly down

into the cold mud.

Now she knew her destiny. She was a girl, a slave girl, suitable prey for such as they, and she knew that they were her natural masters. The eternal laws of biology had decreed that they were the natural masters of such as she.

She was panting, her wide eyes fixed on the searing brand.

"Please, Master," she whispered.

The white-hot metal came closer, it was a fraction of an inch from the soft flesh of her smooth white thigh.

She gasped. "Please, Master."

"Silence. A slave does not speak."

"Yes, Master. You will brand me. But Master, before you brand me, use me as your slave."

The brand was held steady. He frowned.

"Do you beg it, as a true slave?"

"Yes, Master." She wriggled her body on the ground. "I beg it, as a true slave. Give me pleasure to remember in my pain."

That's probably more than enough. Just imagine the same thing repeated for three hundred pages, alternating whips and spiked collars with branding irons, and you have a Gor book. Since I do not want to get into hassles over the theft of copyright material, I should point out that the extract given above is from the new epic masterpiece "Courtier of Gor", rather than one of the John Norman series. And to those of you who have never so much as set eyes on a Gor book, I claim that the extract is imitative, but certainly not exaggerated.

A few other facts, common to the whole Gor series, seem relevant. First, and central: the books are written to be taken seriously. There is no tongue in cheek, no feeling of self-ridicule or self-questioning. And the works are completely humorous, with no attempt at wit or subtlety.

Despite the impression given by the book covers, the books are not pornographic (in the usual sense; although smut, as Tom Lehrer tunelessly pointed out long ago, is in the eye of the beholder). There is no explicit sexual description. What there is, much more unsettling than simple sex can ever be, is a continuous underlying and overlying tone of sadism and domination, a steady reduction of women to the status of chattels and animals. Slave rapes occur every few pages. There are episodes in which the woman carries the man's sandals to him in her mouth, moving on her hands and knees. Dogs behaving like humans are not uncommon in science fiction — humans imitating dogs is another matter. The slave women, naturally, live in kennels.

There are many of the trappings of conventional alternate-Earth/barbarian/warrior-civilization books. You will find tasks, and thalarions, and sul porridge and paga drinks strewn through the pages. The writing is repetitious, as I said earlier, but the simple narrative style is certainly no worse than a thousand and other books of barbarian rubbish that the publishing system spews out each year. The unique premises that make these books different from any others currently being published can be stated in two sentences:

- Women are natural slaves.
- Women accept that fact first with shame and resentment, then with feelings of liberation and joy.

And these books, *mes amis*, sit there on the shelves with my books and your books and everything else that the stores and libraries label *Science Fiction*. And we sit on panels at conventions and wonder why the general public has such a low opinion of the field.

Part 3: "Be to her virtues very kind,

Be to her faults a little blind;

Let all her ways be unconfin'd;

And set your padlock on a steel chain that goes

round her neck and then around the back of a dirty

great pillar and nearly chokes her."

—Matthew Prior, "An English Padlock"

(slightly amended for the Gor readership.)

When I found that I had signed a contract to write *Gor*

novels with my immortal soul as collateral I was not particularly upset. The books don't make much impression in the battle for Nebula Awards, but neither do movie novels or many of the best-sellers. Best of all, as soon as I had read a couple of Gor books I knew that it would be easy enough to write a passable imitation.

I began to get ideas. I would not simply duplicate the Gor model, I would use the same general formula to create whole new lines of work. Not just the debasement of women — that was old hat, even De Sade's "Justine" had episodes in which naked women were used as beasts of burden and whipped when they didn't work hard enough. I would seek fresh woods and pasture new. My books would sell by the cartload.

The formula: take the elements of a standard barbarian world, already familiar to any teenager who browses the sf shelves. Add to this materials that appeal to the dark side of human nature, being careful to pull your punch enough to let the product be termed sf, rather than simple sadism, pornography, or perversion. And be sure to tell your story straight, without a suggestion of humor or satirical intent.

The ideas come flooding into your head. What about good old Vlad Tapes, the original Dracula model? Instead of the elevation of theme practiced so well by Suzy McKee Charnas in "The Vampire Tapestry", let's look at the downside potential. Vlad's taste for impaling is well-known, yet Loo has been written extending the subject to fiction. "The Loo Sanction" has a little bit about impaling, but the variations offered when we move to women as well as men are endless. A lively series, with an impalement (fairly detailed, but not too much so) every twenty pages. . . .

And the Spanish Inquisition. Take the excruciatingly graphic scenes from Keith Roberts' "Pavane", and make them central to the book. Here is the auto-da-fé in all its details, with red-hot pincers, thumbscrews, the rack, the wheel, the burning splinters, the boot, the iron maiden. . . . Just super.

People wouldn't buy it, you say? Come now. Public executions would be as popular today as they were in the eighteenth century. Read Casanova's account of the execution of Damiens, would-be assassin of Louis XV, and note the peculiar relation between torture and sexual excitement. There's a series by itself!

Child sexuality and exploitation? Look how well "Lolita" did, and Nabokov wasn't even trying for sexual stimulation (well, maybe just a bit). Kiddy-sex is in — Brooke Shields and friends — but no one is molding it to the sf market.

War, with all its gruesome horrors — the sf version of "All Quiet On The Western Front". Hunger strikers, with lurid details. The Yorkshire Ripper. Necrophilia, urolagnia, coprophagy. . . .

Perhaps not the last two. They are, so to speak, too much a matter of personal taste. But even without them we have a hundred books to write.

So. How am I doing on my contract?

Time runs, the clock will strike, the devil will come — and I have yet to write my first Gor-ish work. And I know why. The works I am proposing would probably sell, but they would sell nowhere near as well as the John Norman originals, because they lack the key ingredient of all best-selling sf: *wish-fulfillment*.

We like the "good guys" to win — but only if they reflect our own world-views better than the bad guys. We prefer a future society that *either* is not the way we wish society were, and fails, or is the sort of place we would like to be, and succeeds. Our heroes and our heroines share our weaknesses, our aspirations, our ideas of good and evil. When these elements combine to appear in a single book, we say it's a great work. When the combined elements appeal not just to me, but to you and him and her and them, we have a best-selling great book, a book of truly broad appeal.

That's what I find so disturbing about the Gor series. To some substantial segment of the sf readership, these books provide wish-fulfillment. Hundreds of thousands of readers delight in the idea of woman shackled, woman debased, woman as sex-object. It is Tennyson's "Locksley Hall"

philosophy roaring back to us and amplified for this century: "Woman is the lesser man". . . . "Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse." You will hear it in the electronic religion of the Moral Majority, in the speeches of Strom Thurmond, in the stated life-style preference of Nancy Reagan. "Slave Girl of Gor" is the mute backlash to ERA, creeping quietly into science fiction. If, as Science Fiction Review has recently suggested, the sf field is controlled by a Feminist Mafia, the leaders need lessons in the use of power.

But if the idea of Gor as U.S. male-wish-fulfillment is disquieting, let me offer something worse. In Russia, women are "liberated". This means that a woman is expected to work all day at a job as hard as any man's. Then she comes home in the evening and cooks dinner while her husband has a quiet vodka. Afterwards he plays chess with friends while she washes clothes in the bathtub (without the help of detergents), cleans the apartment, and looks after the children.

In Mali, or Upper Volta, or Uganda, the women do all the "women's work" — they plant the fields, tend the crops, wash the clothes, cook the meals, bear and raise the children, and do all the housework. The men do "men's work" — conversation, the making of weapons, and the fighting of wars.

In the Moslem paradise each man has as many hours as he wishes. On earth, women are to be closely guarded, hidden away from the work of men.

Here is the secret message offered to the Gor readers: *Only in America and Europe has the "natural order" broken down.* John Norman can well claim that we are living in a brief interlude where man's natural powers of domination have been subverted, that what he describes is the true once-and-future male-female relationship, here and everywhere. For the moment, Samson has been shorn; Merlin is tricked into his age-long slumber; the God-given sodality of Male Supremacy has been temporarily disrupted; but when the violent times return, the old order will return with them. James Tiptree saw it so clearly — read "The Women Men Don't See".

That's what upsets me about the Gor series — the world-view that lies behind the printed words. That's why I don't think I could ever write a Gor imitation, and why the Devil will be coming in shortly through that open window and carrying me off to the South Bronx. But he will make the pact with others, too. If you are desperately keen to write science fiction (defined to include the Gor works), and if you also are short of money and want to see your books sell, then the market is there. The publishers are there, too, as they are for anything that promises profit. I sincerely believe that the market for John Norman's type of book is not glutted. A large fraction of the sf reading public — that public we so like to think of as more intelligent and thoughtful than the mundane masses — will buy your Gor simulacrum the day it hits the bookstores, and cry out for more. You will not become a literary darling, but you will become a well-known, well-off "sf" writer.

Give the Devil his due. He has kept his part of the bargain.

Epilog: A Fable.

Khanlari, a great contemporary Persian poet, wrote this story:

"The eagle, growing old, did not wish to die. He went to ask a raven, of vast age, the secret of his longevity. The raven led him away from the windy heights of his home, down to a low valley where lay a dunghill and piles of carrion. 'This is my secret,' said the raven. 'Eat foul carrion, and you will become long-lived.'"

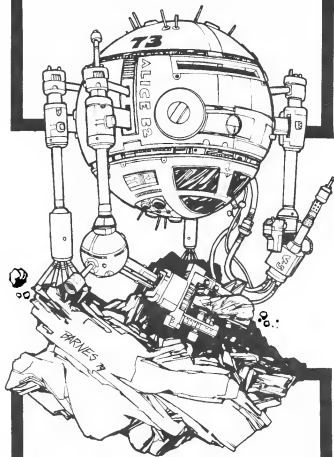
The eagle watched the raven feeding for a while, then thanked him for his information, spread his great wings, and soared aloft. The raven marveled as the eagle flew higher and higher, until he became no more than a point in the sky and at last was gone from view.

And a Moral: The price of life, like the price of wealth or sf fame, may be high but you can refuse to pay it.

Charles Sheffield

Criticism on Criticism:

Budrys Over the Coals



rich brown

The thrust of Algis Budrys' criticism (in the October 1981 issue of *F&SF*) of Julian May's "The Many Colored Land," is that there is a difference between "fans" who write sf and "professionals" who do the same — fans preserve the fanishly preferred icons, others do not — and that this is demonstrated by the book since May is "a fan of very long standing."

The points he brings up about fandom and its relationship to the professional sf world are somewhat blunted by the fact that (as most any active fan can tell you) Julian May is *not* — at least in the context in which A.J. delivers his remarks — a fan of long standing.

What is striking is that Budrys is himself a fan of long

standing in this context. While I may personally discount his recent serious *Locus* column, "On Writing," Budrys has had at least one piece in a fanzine which could be considered fanish — a humorous article about the care and feeding of the type-writer — and has published fanzines himself; thus, he cannot be safely dismissed as yet another pro who knows nothing of fandom but believes himself to be an expert.

This is a relatively common phenomenon among sf professionals. While most are not worth the effort of a reply — after all, what point is there in making a man eat his words if his foot is already lodged in his mouth? — A.J. is worth correcting, since he seems quite a perceptive fellow in other respects.

Budrys communicates confusion when he speaks of sf fandom. On the one hand, early in his review, he spins a dozen or so paragraphs explaining fandom, which he says is comprised of "thousands; tens of thousands, ranging in age from the single-digit numbers on up through nonageria." Obviously, he has attended a world convention or two; why he fails to realize that a substantial number, probably even *most*, of the attendees at today's world convention may not be fans of the *written* form of sf is a bit beyond me. Even back when this was not the case, most attendees were people who had heard about the con through a local sf club, the prozines or local advertising — one-timers who walked in off the street but (for the most part) never attended another. Fans who are involved in the microcosm have been in the minority at these conventions for at least 20 years.

Now, all these people may be called fans, as may the subscribers to *F&SF* — which is part of the problem. The regular readers of any sf magazine, the occasional convention attendee, the person who goes to a local club, the avid or casual collector, the subscribers to *Locus* and *SFR*, are all fans — *unless*, by the term, you mean those involved in fandom.

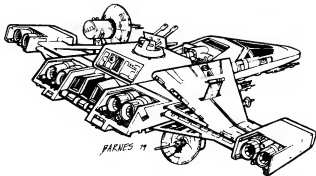
A.J. makes it obvious, when he gets down to brass tacks, it is these fans he is talking about: "... in some cases, some sf stories cannot be understood except by Fans... from about 1940 until quite recently [fandom] was the source of new sf writers, artists, and editors, who typically served an apprenticeship in the very large and proliferated Finnish publishing establishment... Thus, as you might expect, there are a secret language and a body of tradition, both nurtured about the Finnish publishing establishment and then disseminated in person-to-person contact..."

There are not "thousands" or "tens of thousands" of people so involved, unless you count the *subscribers* to such present-day fanzines as *Locus* or *SFR* (many of whom are professionals seeking news or feedback, and who might altogether number two or three thousand in any event). There are probably never more than a few hundred people in fandom at any one time — by which I mean people who are *actively* involved in publishing, writing or drawing for the fanzines.

I am not the leading authority on fanzine fandom — merely a "fan of long standing," and Budrys himself prelates me as a fan. But I speak the fanish jargon well enough to know his definition of the fanish use of "mundane" (for example) is incomplete, since it means something which (or someone who) has nothing to do with sf or *fandom*, not merely someone/something which has nothing to do with sf, and is *sometimes* but *not* always a pejorative.

I entered the microcosm a quarter of a century ago — in late 1956 — but I've read the fanhistories, collected old fanzines (dating back to the early 1930s), briefly wrote *Amazing's* fanzine review column "The Club House," wrote one of those sf stories which "cannot be fully understood" except by fans ("Dear Ted," *Fantastic*, Oct. 1972), published fanzines and contributed stories, articles, reviews and letters to others. I have made a few sf sales and even blushing admit to having once been foolish enough to join SFWA.

Budrys, despite having been a fan himself, communicates confusion when he speaks of fandom because he first refers to one area ("tens of thousands") and then to another ("apprenticeship in the very large and proliferated Finnish publishing establishment") as though they were the same. After defining fandom, and building toward his point about how those



exposed to fandom make literary choices that are dictated by fanish attitudes, he cites as an "apt example" of all this Judy/Julian May. Judy May was active in Chicago fan circles and an avid convention-goer, but the fact that she was never involved in fanzine fandom to any appreciable degree takes the point off Budrys' otherwise sharp observations.

As I've said, there are fans and then there are fans, just as there is a New York and then there is a New York. One is contained in the other, but A.J., however much he may know better, seems at times to be speaking of the state and at others about the city, without ever distinguishing between the two. But obviously New York City is not New York State and, at least obviously to some, convention fans are not fanzine fans.

While the Hugo is voted upon by the membership of the world of convention and is important to the entire sf community, the breeding ground of sf professionals of which Budrys speaks, where the on-going communication takes place, is in the fanzines. Convention fans organize and go to conventions, then go home again (Thomas Wolfe to the contrary notwithstanding), while the fanzine fans' activities go on 365 days a year.

Had A.J. confined himself to club and convention fandom, I could not deny Julian May's standing as a fan. If fanzine fandom is aware of her at all, it is as a convention fan; I am unaware, at least, of anything she has had in a fanzine, and while the fact that I've never seen anything by her in the fanish press does not mean she has never had anything there, I think I can safely say she has never had anything there of note. And A.J. was speaking of the phenomenon of how one learns to write, draw or edit by writing, drawing and editing for fanzines — not how one learns to write, draw or edit by putting on conventions, or being a big wheel in local fan circles.

Budrys, with his publication of fanzines up into the '60s, his column in *Locust* and article on the care and feeding of the typewriter in Lee Hoffman's *Excelsior*, is more a "fan" than May. Therefore, even if "The Many-Colored Land" (as he suggests) makes the type of literary choices which fans "like" — and that too may be open to debate — it is irrelevant, since Ms. May receives less input from fandom than A.J. does himself.

Budrys is correct when he says fandom (which read: those involved in fanzine fandom) has provided a large number of sf writers, editors and artists. Some have been good, others bad. Ray Palmer edited what is generally credited as the first fanzine; he also gave us the Shaver Mystery. Damon Knight gave fandom its silly "national" organization, the National Fantasy Fan Federation; failing to learn from his mistake, he gave sf professionals an equivalent organization, the Science Fiction Writers of America. Don Wolheim, Robert Lowndes, Ted Carnell, Fred Pohl, Cyril Kornbluth, Larry Shaw, Ray Bradbury, Bob (Wilson) Tucker, Forrest J. Ackerman, Sam Moskowitz are among those who published fanzines and were prominent fans before they became professional writers and editors — and here I'm only speaking of the "early" years, the late 1920s and early 1930s. Isaac Asimov, "Doc" Keller, Richard Wilson and Arthur C. Clarke contributed to fanzines of the same period but I'm uncertain — not being a leading authority — as to whether they actually published their own. Charles Hornig was, at the age of 17, pulled from the fanzine

ranks to edit *Air Wonder Stories*. And so forth.

I'm really not into making lists, but a few of the later fanzine publishing fans who made it into prodrom as they occur to me off the top of my head (i.e. this is by no means complete) include the following: James Blish, Robert Silverberg, F.M. Busby, Harlan Ellison, Ted White, Bob Shaw, James White, Bob Leman, Janita Coulson, Hank Stine, Lee Hoffman, William Rostler, Terry Carr, Calvin Demmon, Tom Reamy, Somtow Sucharitkul, Jack & Joe Haldeman, Darrell Schweitzer, Ray Nelson, Dave Van Arman, Marion Zimmer Bradley, George Scithers, Harry Warner Jr., Joseph Greene, Gordon Eklund, Greg Benford, Jack Chalker... well, as I say, this list could easily go on. It could go on and on if I listed those substantially involved in fanzine fandom without publishing fanzines themselves. I'm not so well versed on the artists fandom can claim credit for, although Hannes Bok, Mike Hinge, George Barr, Alicia Austin, Dan Steffan, Steve Stiles, Jay Kinney, Joe Station and Dan Adkins spring to mind.

Some of these people have remained in the microcosm and call themselves fans, despite their professional sales. Some professionals have wandered into fandom, long after their first sale, to remain involved over the years. Robert Bloch is perhaps the prime example. And there are probably easily a hundred people like myself — those who have made occasional prozine sales; dillitantes; people who love the genre but aren't prepared to and/or do not desire to turn an enjoyable leisure-time pursuit into the drudgery of a full-time career. While I can't speak for all these people, I believe most of us feel we have received enjoyment from sf and fandom over the years and therefore try to give some of it back. (We don't all succeed, but we all try.)

I see nothing remarkable, incidentally, about fanzine fans selling professional sf. Budrys' point about it being the equivalent of the population of Trinidad supplying the major writers in the English language for the next generation would be more apt if he stipulated that the population of Trinidad were actively and enthusiastically engaged in learning writing as a form of enjoyable communication and perhaps had a disproportionate share of top-notch writers, critics and English professors available to all the local Free University. It takes a more-than-passing interest in an area of writing to want to get together to discuss it with others, and when writing is used to express your views, it is not all that unusual to learn something about the craft — particularly if your errors are criticized and your good points praised. This occurs in fanzines as a matter of course.

The general consensus in fandom over the years has been that there is enough bad sf being published in the prozines without adding to it in the fanzines. So there's not (as some might suspect) a lot of amateur sf in fanzines; fans tend to write fanciful fiction about themselves and fandom, and articulate their views not only about sf but about every subject under this or any sun (since the subject of sf is every subject under this or any sun); they write their brand of personal journalism about sf, themselves, conventions, their experiences. Since many professional writers, artists and editors remain involved in fandom for the fun of it, and shop talk is not uncommon, fans learn how the professional sf world really works.

And, as A.J. says, they have their traditions and flights of fancy, their in-group jokes, their esoteric and special language. (Well, sf has its own special language, for all of that — it's no longer necessary for the Hero to explain to the Heroine in explicit gobbledygook how the star-drive works; this first got in the way of the action, then in the way of character development, as sf was growing up, and therefore was easy to discard. Unless the writer has some *new* idea to throw out, there's no convincing reason against using shorthand conventions such as "star drive" or "time machine" to convey the meaning without pointless explanations for the sophisticated sf reader — howevermuch this might seem confusing to readers of more mundane [no pejorative intended] fiction. Likewise, writers of Regency Romances can refer to "the ton" without bothering to explain to *their* readers they are talking about the upper 2000 of that society. So nu?)

What follows are some observations about fandom and the phenomenon of fanzine fans becoming professional writers; it's not aimed at anything Budrys said in his column but for the fact that it buttresses what I've been saying here.

In the mainstream of fanzine fandom, no payment is made beyond egoboo for what people write, draw or edit. (There are a few exceptions but the general rule still applies.) Other fans respond to what is written — critically if the craft is bad, with praise if it is not. Some people can't take criticism and go away for that reason. Others can take criticism but do not improve and so find themselves underpaid in the coin of the realm, egoboo. Somewhere in there, because fandom recognizes that true appreciation lies not in dumb admiration but rather in emulation of creativity, they may learn something about editing or drawing or putting words together, since they're familiar with the genre, they frequently try their hand at — and often become more or less successful at — writing, drawing or editing professionally.

Fanzine fandom is a virtual utopia of creativity. Many people — people who have made hundreds of sales, people who have never sold, people who do not care to try to sell — create in fandom for the joy of it. Some write professionally in other areas; X.J. Kennedy, the poet, for example, was known to fans as Joe Kennedy — his letters appeared in the old *TWS* and *Planet Stories* and he published the focal point fanzine of his time, *Vampyre*.

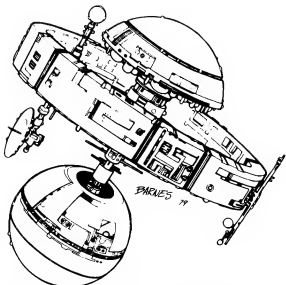
What may be surprising to professionals not involved in fandom is that, for all the fact that fandom is infested with "dirty pros" (as we sometimes affectionately call them), the two people generally believed to be fandom's best writers — Walt Willis and Charles Burbee — have sold but half a professional sf story between them. (Willis collaborated with James White on one short story which appeared in *If* but also wrote a delightful nonfiction book about Ireland.)

Although fandom has supplied sf with many of its professionals, many people who have entered the field another way have the mistaken notion fans view fandom as a place to learn to become an sf pro. As hard as it may be to believe, despite fandom's "success" at this, nothing could be further from the truth. Something Walt Willis said in 1964 seems particularly applicable here, so let me quote it:

The Eskimos, it is said, can distinguish fourteen varieties of snow. Certain Polynesian tribes, on the other hand, have only three numerals — one, two and plenty. All this proves is that the Eskimos have a lot of snow and the Polynesians a lot of everything else. It would be an arrogant Eskimo who would accuse the Polynesians of being stupid, because if he's so smart why isn't he living on a South Sea island?

... I'm sure there are at least fourteen varieties of snow, and that somewhere there is a variety in which the members regard the word "training ground for the pros" — that catchphrase used by people trying to justify a hobby to people incapable of understanding the truth. The truth, of course, is that we are amateurs. Amateurs, from the Latin *amare*, to love. We are not frustrated professionals, any more than an affectionate wife is a frustrated gold-digger. We are in fandom for love of science fiction and the friends we have made through it.

In any field of activity the term amateur is as proud a title as professional, or prouder. It is just an unfortunate historical accident, and not the only thing we have Gernsback to blame for, that we happen to be called fans. We are not fans in the popular sense of fawning acolyte, however disappointing this fact may be to Randall Garrett. Moreover any adulation we do show is, I suggest, largely misplaced. It is all right to admire Ted Sturgeon if you like his writing, just as you may admire Dean Grennell for his. But only for the writing itself and to the extent you admire it, not because one gets paid for it and the other doesn't, I would go further and say that of those honored at the last *Chicon* the best fanzine editor was more to be admired than the best prozine editor, because the former is at least as good at his hobby as the latter at his job.



About the only up-dating this quote really needs is to replace "Randall Garrett" with "Jerry Pournelle."

I'm not here to indoctrinate A.J. on what fandom is and the reasons it is what it is; I merely find a number of his points debatable where his understanding of fandom appears, perhaps by virtue of failure to think through the implications of what he says, less than perfect. Because his understanding is, for whatever reason, less than perfect, Budrys makes implications which do not actually apply. To be charitable, it is possible he did not mean to imply that May was a fanzine fan; when he does get around to identifying her place in fandom, what he actually says is truth — she is "a fan, of very long standing, once deeply involved in the fanish community and such signature activities as the writing of fanish verses to Sullivan melodies." (I might quibble that she was involved in a fanish community.) Perhaps he cannot see that since he said these fans-turned-pros "typically" serve an apprenticeship in fanzine fandom, his citing of May as an "apt example" of what he's talking about conveys precisely that implication.

Budrys suggests there are certain books which have won critical and popular acclaim, endorsements and even awards within the field almost solely because they preserve fanishly popular icons, but which "can seem plainly undeserving of such encomia when one applies reasonable, ordinary and reliable critical standards learned from general literature." The reverse is true with books which fail to preserve these icons. It's a good point, although not one I am sure I entirely agree with; the most recent case of a fan-turned-pro who won a Hugo for best novel was Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*. Obviously, that can't be used to "prove" A.J.'s contention, since it leads to a larger question: Just how did fans — even if they did number in the "tens of thousands" — manage to keep it, icons and all, on *The New York Times*' best seller list for so long, if A.J. is right in what he believes?

On the other hand, could it be that that's why Budrys had to choose May — because the real fanzine fans who've entered the professional ranks don't fit his notions?

Well, this is all obviously conjecture. Some of the fans I've listed here are multiple Hugo and Nebula winners; others have written some of the worst clunkers in the genre. Going over the incomplete list, I would find it difficult to discover the fanish signatures Budrys speaks of in more than a few of them. What does it all mean? Maybe A.J. could tell us; maybe he couldn't. It might be enjoyable to see him try — as I say, he seems quite a perceptive fellow. What remains to be done is for him to do it in a case where the criticism he makes and the insights he comes up with actually apply to the work in question.

— rich brown, 1981



REJECTION! REJECTION!

Golden Hits from the
Big Pile, 1975-1980

MIKE CONNER

Ain't it beautiful? Seven thousand words of creative genius neatly typed on spotless bond paper, stuffed inside a 30-cent manila along with a cover letter (something to emphasize a connection with this magazine, like, "Your good friend Jack and I talked over an afterdinner cognac/cock and we agreed you'd really like this sort of piece..."), and, because I'm postal-smart, a piece of cardboard stiffener. My story, all ready to go, tongue-out licking the flap when I remember—slap to the forehead—I've almost forgotten that return envelope! For a moment, I consider not sending one along; after all, there's no way they're rejecting this story, and besides, it's *a priori* defeatism, broadcasting negative vibes that could turn a close decision against me.

Anyway, maybe my editor-to-be will get a charge out of that return envelope, humorously puffing his or her pipe while chuckling, "Why, that scamp's just wasted 58¢ return postage! I'll just peel off these stamps and paperclip 'em to our contract form!" So, I fold a 4th class return envelope in half and stick it in; then off it goes, a sure sale. . .

. . . And six weeks later, I discover it was a good thing I included that envelope, sucker, 'cause that story's slid back down the pipeline faster than a bus station burrito. And inside it, a little dog-eared now, maybe sporting a coffee ring or two, is my pride and joy. Bad enough, right? But wait! There's something else rattling around inside that damned envelope. You know what I'm talking about, it comes in different sizes and shapes and colors, but the message is always the same:

Dear Author:

Our editors have read the enclosed submission. Unfortunately, it does not meet the present needs of our magazine.

Best of luck with another market.

THE EDITORS

I've already submitted—says so right here—and now comes the heel in the back, the explanation that says nothing, the shivering light in a cold, cold gloom, the pro-forma courtesy stirring the ashes of my incinerated hopes, that extra thrust of the knee to the creative groin. Ah, the rejection slip.

We've had more than our share, haven't we? I know I have. In fact, I've got a little pile of r's right here next to my

typewriter (if I could afford a word processor I wouldn't be writing this article), my personal "best-of" Rejection Collection. I can rattle the stack and animate the whole cartoon-paradox of communication, for here are words, simple words, blunt words, words plainly stated, words which mean one thing to the people who sent them, and something else altogether to those on the receiving end.

How can this be? Aren't we in the business of communicating with each other? Well, witness my hypothetical editor finishing my submission, which, for any of a hundred reasons from hemorrhoids to strabismus, won't do. So he packs it into my return envelope, but before he seals it, he includes a printed rj by way of professional courtesy, because every other editor he's ever heard of or dealt with has done the same since the time of Bartelby. As far as he is concerned, that's the end of it. He intends no insult, nor does he imagine I'll attach any deep meaning to the form he's returning with my story.

Unfortunately, he's got a wounded party on the other end searching for answers, and the only answer I've got to go on is that same rj. That is when a four-line form letter bespeaks volumes. "Dear Author," it begins. (We're really stretching that word, you know, giving you the benefit of a big A. If we really had our way, your license would be lifted post-haste.) "We have read the enclosed submission." (It took our janitor six hours to finger-point his way through this syntactical and typographical abomination.) "Unfortunately," (hardy har-har!) "it does not meet the present needs of our magazine." (Which uses only material provided by close personal friends, relatives, or the editor's current squeeze.) "Best of luck in another market." (Eat kitty litter, puke-face.)

And that's just a regular, simple rj! What about the more elaborate ones, the ones that try harder for grace and sympathy? well, let's run through my "best-of" pile and see how some of the God-figures in and out of our genre handle the distasteful task of desk-clearing. . .

I see quite a few from the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Now, you have to have sympathy for Mr. Ed Ferman and his staff, because *F&SF* is probably the most popular address for Creative Writing majors who write humanistic/anthro/sf stories about alien cultures like the "Kroeb'r" whose individuals change gender in the presence of hard-line, techy, but secretly sexually confused Anthro Team Leaders.

INTERVIEW:

SOMTOW SUCHARITKUL

BY
DARRELL
SCHWEITZER



Somtow Sucharitkul may very well be the Cosmic Guru and Perfect Spiritual Master of Oriental Wisdom. Then again, maybe not. One thing is for certain: he is marvellously entertaining, either in person or in print, and he is one of the brightest new talents to appear in science fiction in recent years. Aside from one earlier story in *Unearth*, he began to appear in *Analog* and *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* in 1979. His popularity was readily established with his "Mallworld" series, about a gigantic shopping center floating in space (Yes, there will be one called "A Mall and the Night Visitor" . . .), and the "Inquestor" series, rather an odd mixture of Cordwainer Smith and John Varley, about a future universe dominated by religious tyranny (but in which there are flashes of bizarre beauty). He has also been published in Roy Torgeson's anthologies, and his novel, *The Starship and the Haiku*, is forthcoming from Pocket Books. The collected Mallworld stories will be published by Starblaze. Sucharitkul has been nominated for the John Campbell Award for best new writer, in response to which he has launched the "Sucharitkul in 80" campaign, complete with sandwich-board signs, buttons, parties, but no ticket-price parades yet, all of which is amusing precisely because it is superfluous. His work is good enough for him to win without any campaign. However, some sports have waged a counter-campaign with buttons like: IF GOD HAD INTENDED SUCHARITKUL IN 80 HE WOULD HAVE GIVEN HIM A PRONOUNCABLE NAME. Actually, it's pronounced the same way it is spelled, in America at least.

Somtow is also a composer of avant-garde music (he described himself once as "a sort of Neo-Asian post-Seriatist person"), and, as a hobby, he explains the meaning of life.

Thrust: Would you tell us about your earliest published work?
Sucharitkul: Well, when I was 11 years old, I wrote a poem called "Kith of Infinity" about which the only real thing of note was it contained the word "quasi-tangible." This poem, which is about a child who feels a strange esoteric relationship with the wind, appeared three years later in *The Bangkok Post*. Three years was already later

enough to be excruciatingly embarrassing. Shirley MacLaine was passing through Bangkok at the time, and I suppose the newspaper was delivered to her room with a rose at the hotel in the morning, and she read the poem. For some reason she thought it had been written by an Oriental sage who had been dead for two thousand years. In fact, because the poem contained the line "I am not a man," because I was a kid, she probably thought I was a feminist 2000-year-old Oriental sage. I don't really know this, though. But it changed her life, and the next thing I knew that that several years later her autobiography came out, and there was this poem on the front page. And, you know, I'm much older than I was then, now, and I've had things published in nationally circulated magazines and so on, but never in my life has anything I've written been so widely circulated as this horrible poem. I understand it sold millions of copies. I was paid eventually. I found a lawyer who wrote her a letter, in which he informed her that I had not been dead for 2000 years, and she wrote an apologetic letter back, thanking me for letting her use the poem. That's my Shirley MacLaine story. For a while I was convinced that I could get masses of money out of this because they had let out the last line, and because I had suffered psychological damage by having this poem published, because it was such a lousy poem. But somehow I didn't manage to make that stick. I haven't seen her since, or heard from her.

Thrust: Were you immediately inspired to have a writing career at this point, or did that come later?

Sucharitkul: My writing career really began when I read Robert Heinlein's *Methuselah's Children*. I was so impressed by this book that I immediately wrote a two-page novel with exactly the same plot, minus the point of the story. My next incursion into literature was about a year later, when I was eleven, when I started writing a whole bunch of poems, including the horrible poem, "Kith of Infinity." I also wrote a play which was a version of Shakespeare's

Julius Caesar in very bad Latin, which was performed at the Bangkok Patana School — which is the British School of Bangkok — with me as Brutus. The next play I wrote was an English version of Sophocles' *Electra*. This was performed when I was eleven or so, also at the Bangkok Patana School, and the person who played Apollo was immediately killed the next week by his little brother, who accidentally shot him with his father's gun. This taught me a lot about *hubris*.

Thrust: What did it teach you about *hubris*? Doesn't the Sucharitkul in '80 Campaign suggest that you haven't learned much about it?

Sucharitkul: The Sucharitkul in '80 Campaign is very insidious, because it's the only militantly tacky campaign ever mounted. The fact that the tackiness appears as a joke only hides the inner insidiousness of the whole thing. Anyway, I don't expect to win the Campbell Award this year, but in 1981 I should be able to win on the pity vote, since I am not planning to run a campaign that year. But I've learned a lot about *hubris*. If I were really as conceited as I deserve to be, you wouldn't see the end of me.

Thrust: Did you get sidetracked into music, or did this come as part of the psychological effect of writing those poems?

Sucharitkul: I've always been interested in music, but I really only became involved when I was sent to school in England. I went to a funny school in England where everybody wears tails. It was called Eton. I was there for five years. They had incredibly good music there. In fact, it was very different from the schools in the movie *If*. [Which is about English schoolboys overthrowing their teachers in a violent revolt.] It was very liberal in a strange sort of way. Although you had to wear tails, you could select your own tutor. A very interesting school. It was there that I started composing music. I converted my self-taught piano-playing to piano lessons. I did have some lessons when I was four years old, but I made the teacher cry, and she had a tantrum and left, and after that I didn't have any until I was 13. I remember this vaguely, but she said, "Why don't you write a little piece?" So I did that, and the key signature was six flats. Actually I didn't know what it meant, but I just put it in to look good. The teacher was so horrified that she started crying.

Thrust: Over the fact that you had written a piece? That she had created a monster?

Sucharitkul: Something like that. She started crying because it wasn't what she wanted. This was in Holland, by the way, which was a place where I lived when I was a kid. I lived in four countries by the time I was seven: England, France, Holland, and Boston — I suppose that's a country, isn't it?

Thrust: What about Thailand?

Sucharitkul: I left when I was six months old.

Thrust: Does the music bear any relation to your writing career?

Sucharitkul: I don't really see any barrier between them, but I'm much better at writing music right now. I think I've had more practice. It's easier to write music.

Thrust: You very suddenly came on the science fiction scene. Was this a sudden effort, or had you been working at it for a while before something gave way?

Sucharitkul: I had been working on it for about a year before I made my first sale. You see, science fiction had always been something that I enjoyed reading a lot, and I'd never had any problems with being beaten up for reading pulps, because I never grew up in a country where science fiction was considered evil. They were always very pleased that I was reading anything at all.

Thrust: You've mentioned that your shopping center in space, Mallworld, is a place you'd like to live in, but others consider it a chilling dystopia. How do you account for this difference?

Sucharitkul: Somebody once described the Mallworld series as

a sort of Alice in Wonderland, only it was Somtow in America. Actually it was Hank Stine who so described it. You see, one of the reasons I love America so much is that it has wonderful, quaint, picturesque native customs, and it has these elegant edifices and institutions — you know, McDonald's and such strange, exotic temples. And the natives are wonderful. They're naive and childlike, but they're very interesting. I love it here. The Mallworld series is a tribute to the beauty and glory of Americanism.

Thrust: How come the Americans regard all this stuff as tacky and tasteless?

Sucharitkul: I don't know. Maybe the Greeks regarded the Parthenon as very tacky.

Thrust: Was there a McDonald's there?

Sucharitkul: There's a McDonald's in Tokyo. I believe the McDonald's in Hong Kong is the largest daily grossing McDonald's on Earth.

Thrust: Frightening prospect... Is there a McDonald's in Mallworld?

Sucharitkul: No. You see, they've evolved beyond that into even more grandiose extremes of tackiness.

Thrust: How do you define tackiness and why do you find it so appealing?

Sucharitkul: It's just like a new toy. To me it's sort of like Richard Strauss' middle and later period works. It's wallowing in the glory of shit. It's beautiful.

Thrust: Occidental Inscrutability, you mean?

Sucharitkul: Oh yes. You Occidentals are incredibly inscrutable.

Thrust: What is the origin of the Mallworld series? Did you envision a shopping center floating in space?

Sucharitkul: Believe it or not, I do a lot of my writing in a shopping mall. There's a large shopping mall, called Springfield Mall, near where I live. It has these wonderful, rounded seats which give you a little puddle of seclusion in the middle of the bustle. I sometimes sit there and write. So far no one has arrested me for loitering. They will one day, no doubt. I also write a lot in coffee shops. In particular there's one coffee shop near my house where they know I'm a writer. So they always ply me with coffee and come over and pamper me, and I enjoy that. I used to write music in a coffee shop in Bangkok, and there was always an audience.

Thrust: Do you sit there with a typewriter in a coffee shop?

Sucharitkul: No, I write in longhand. At least I write all the salient points of each scene in longhand before I do any typing. I think it shows.

Thrust: In what way?

Sucharitkul: Well, I hate to boast, but...

Thrust: Go ahead.

Sucharitkul: For a person who is totally oral in his life, I'm very anal-retentive when it comes to writing. Although my rooms are the epitome of utter messiness, I actually try to write with great care. Maybe because it's still quite hard in some ways.

Thrust: Is this an outline you write longhand, or an actual first draft?

Sucharitkul: It depends. A lot of it is counting syllables, and doing stuff like that, doing all the stuff they taught me to do in analysis of literature in school.

Thrust: You mean setting it up with the precision of poetry?

Sucharitkul: Yes, I often do that. Especially with opening paragraphs.

Thrust: To the point of metering it?

Sucharitkul: No, no, I'm not a meter maid when it comes to that [laughs]... I enjoy it when it comes out right, but it doesn't always.

Thrust: What makes a story successful for you?

Sucharitkul: Well, I haven't been that satisfied with — No, I shouldn't say that, should I? I should really boast.

Thrust: But if you say that it will seem like humility and lend credence to —

Sucharitkul: Okay, I'll say that then. I'm never really that satisfied with anything I write. As George Scithers knows I

keep sending him letters after I've mailed him a manuscript, telling him what revisions I want to make. In one or two cases this has crossed in the mail with a letter from him demanding the same revisions. My entire training is in mainstream. All my degrees are in mainstream. I don't have a degree in science fiction. This may be why my science fiction doesn't quite please me.

Thrust: Shouldn't such a background give you an advantage because you know something *other* than science fiction? We have a classic type in fandom who knows nothing but sf and tries to write sf. I think you know how that turns out. What do you have a degree in, anyway?

Sucharitkul: I have a degree in English Literature and Music — it's a double major — from Cambridge.

Thrust: Isn't this background advantageous?

Sucharitkul: "Yeah," he said. This is one of my famous one word answers. But as I have been describing, I only came to writing science fiction fairly late, apart from the abortive Heinlein novel. I must have been about twenty-four before I even attempted to write science fiction. I started off with fake Greek plays and went on to poetry. I'm still trying to write those Greek plays and those poems, actually, only this time I'm making money by pretending they're — woops! Abort that.

Thrust: You're incorporating the Greek plays into the science fiction, then.

Sucharitkul: Oh yes. I've done an Orpheus. I've done a *Heart of Darkness*. I've done most things. Orpheus in Mallworld is one of my better stories. "Sing a Song of Mallworld."

Thrust: But you haven't done "Mallworld Becomes Electra" yet.

Sucharitkul: I'm planning to. I already have that one plotted, but that won't be till after "Mallworld Graffiti," so we'll have to wait about six months maybe before I come up with the story. I'm doing "A Mall and the Night Visitors" first. The only thing about that is, though, that it'll have to come out in the Christmas issue. Not necessarily, I guess.

Thrust: The strange thing is that despite titles like these, the stories are not farces. You use gag titles for serious stories.

Sucharitkul: I've done that in the past. I think "This Towering Torment" is not an example of it, however. Yes, that's very true otherwise. "Sing a Song of Mallworld" is an extremely serious story, but the whole story is disguised as a gag, because I think the reader needs sugar-coated pills. Of course I am not really in this business to give people pills. I don't see myself as a physician of the human condition. But when I have to take a pill myself, I might as well let them get it too.

Thrust: You mean you're giving yourself a pill through these stories?

Sucharitkul: Yes, of course. I think everybody does that. That's the central *angst* of the creative artist, isn't it?

Thrust: Or words to that effect... But what about the Inquester series, which isn't as sugar-coated? These do not have gag titles or aggressive tactlessness.

Sucharitkul: Oh, but it is sugar coated, or haven't you noticed?

Thrust: It's a different kind of sugar.

Sucharitkul: That's it. All my stories are about the meaning of life, actually, although some of them are about it less aggressively than others. You see, it all boils down to love, you know, the old Ted Sturgeon thing.

Thrust: Considering that the meaning of life was discovered in "A Day in Mallworld," which was one of your first published stories, where do you go from there?

Sucharitkul: It was a meaning of life. You don't understand. A meaning of life, only. But, yes... one of the reasons that the Inquester universe is the way it is, is that I wanted to create a universe of incredible brutality and beauty at the same time. I wanted to make things extremely extreme, so that the emotions and the compassion of the characters could be highlighted. How about that?

Thrust: The Inquester universe can't help but remind readers of Cordwainer Smith's Instrumentality of Mankind. Do you

see any similarity?

Sucharitkul: Not really. I think that Cordwainer Smith is God. I have a very large pantheon, by the way. There are a lot of demons too, but we won't talk about them. The anti-Christ is probably — well, never mind. But... Cordwainer Smith. My Inquester series is *less Oriental* than Cordwainer Smith's Instrumentality. The enormously brutal and beautiful universe shares some elements. Although I would hardly claim to be a hard science fiction writer, I make more of an attempt to appear that way than Cordwainer Smith does. I think.

Thrust: Do you have any literary models? Did anyone influence you heavily?

Sucharitkul: Yes. Let me think for a while. Marlowe, and Donne. And Chip Delaney and Ursula LeGuin. Kind of a big gap there, but I hate all 19th Century literature.

Thrust: What kind of a Mallworld story would John Donne have written?

Sucharitkul: I think "Sing a Song of Mallworld" is the closest. You see, I believe — now here's my great theory of science fiction, so be sure to get this. T.S. Eliot claims that a dissociation of sensibility took place after the metaphysical poets. Intellect and emotion became separated. Science fiction is a reassociation of sensibility, a process by which intellectual statements can again generate emotion, as they did in the 16th Century. This is my underlying theory of science fiction.

Thrust: It would seem to me that if a story makes an intellectual statement without generating emotion, at the very best we have a prose wiring diagram. Emotion is an essential of any fiction.

Sucharitkul: Yes, like certain stories in a certain magazine. Yes. By the way, is this magazine a frog because it goes "rivet, rivet?" Perhaps its prince will come.

Thrust: I've never seen you writing criticism. Do you take theories of science fiction very seriously when writing?

Sucharitkul: No. But I can discourse at great length on them to academics, and they love it. Most of my discursing to academics has been in the music field, but I'm going to be off in March to discourse on science fiction in Boca Raton Florida. There's this big fantasy/academic con there, and I'm going to lay my new dissociation of sensibility theory on them.

Thrust: Would you tell us something about your forthcoming novel, which is not entitled *The Humpback of Notre Dame*?

Sucharitkul: I'm calling it *The Starship and the Haiku*. They've suggested that I change the title. So we don't know what it'll be yet. I've suggested *The Humpback of Notre Dame* simply because it is about whales. In fact it's a post-holocaust novel in which the Japanese discover that they are the result of genetic experiments performed by whales.

Thrust: The whole human race, or just the Japanese?

Sucharitkul: Just the Japanese.

Thrust: Do you find the techniques for generating a single story of that length much different than for a series?

Sucharitkul: The real reason I wrote that novel was that I couldn't sell the short story version to anyone. So I thought, "Let's turn it into a novel and see what happens." In the novel I managed to explain most of the things which were ambiguous in the short story, but most of all it was infinitely better than the short story anyway. I'm glad I did it. It has a new narrative technique in it, a very Japanese technique in the sense that it's told in little mosaic stones. It's been done of course in serious literature.

Thrust: What do you mean by "serious literature?" The implication is that science fiction isn't serious.

Sucharitkul: Science fiction certainly is serious, or it can be. It runs the entire gamut from literature to rubbish, which is something very few other genres do. There are very few unrubbishy gothics, in my opinion, whereas there are certainly a lot of unrubbishy science fiction novels.

Thrust: It seems to me that "literature" runs the entire gamut from literature to rubbish.

Sucharitkul: Well...you know, I'm only talking about good literature, he said, begging the question.

Thrust: Which of course may be defined as what you mean when you point at it.

Sucharitkul: Just like science fiction.

Thrust: This could be a basic paradigm for the meaning of human existence.

Sucharitkul: Well, as I was saying to you before, I really get off on paradigms. They give me orgasms. Especially intricately-structured, multi-layered paradigms. It is this rather than the sex scenes that really give me orgasms in a book like *Dhalgren*. I like to draw very complicated graphs of everything I'm going to do, both music and writing. In fact, before I write every scene I draw a graph and fit all the characters on one axis, and the time frame on the other axis, and of course a lot of squiggles and things. Then I draw a little square, and I mark where all the characters are standing, as though on a stage, and I mark all the light sources in the image, so when I describe the way the light falls on things it's always consistent.

Thrust: That's certainly a way to write visually. I remember a scene in something of mine where I had to go back in a revision and put the moon up, because I was convinced nobody could see anything and I didn't want them stumbling around in the dark.

Sucharitkul: I think it helps if you have the moon there in the first place. That's only the way I do it. Some people put it there afterwards.

Thrust: It's probably very Jungian.

Sucharitkul: Yes. I like to feel that I'm constantly mooning my characters. [Laughs.]

Thrust: What are your future plans as a great science fiction writer?

Sucharitkul: I don't know. I don't think I'm one yet, but I hope to achieve that state as soon as possible. My future plans. Let me get back to why I wrote science fiction. I started telling you about all the other literary forms I went through. But the real reason I started to write science fiction was that I couldn't write any music. I was totally blocked. So I decided to write a science fiction story instead. And it was really awful. There was this planet which orbited this sun, and it was perpetually enshrouded with dust particles except for a few days of the year. No, maybe it was the other way around. I can't remember. And anyway it was a first fuck story, and the above-mentioned copulatory act took place in a gorgeous pool of light when the people from the other planet, which was not in the gas cloud, had landed there. They had all sorts of strange anthropological rites, which were probably gleaned from that book, *Ritual Mutilation* or whatever — the book about the African tribesmen who claim to their wives that they never shit. It's by Freud. Anyway, the second story I wrote I actually sold to *Roy Torgeson* two or three years later after revising it five times. He thinks it's wonderful. I'm not that sure about it. I think it has its moments but sometimes it's silly. It's called "Comets and Kings." So that's the earliest story I wrote that is in print.

Thrust: What was the problem which made your earliest stories unpublishable?

Sucharitkul: They were lousy.

Thrust: Did you realize they were lousy in a specific way and take definite steps to correct this?

Sucharitkul: Oh yeah. I think I learned fairly fast, because I became pretty publishable by about the seventh story. That was the *Analog* sale. I sold one story to a semi-prozine before that, *Unearth*. I wouldn't have written that story that way now, certainly. I really screwed up the ending very badly. That too had its moments. If I had been wise I would not have submitted it. You see, I was at this con. I decided to go to science fiction conven-

tions about a year after I tried to write science fiction. Usually I was always not in America whenever there was a con wherever I was. This was Ballcon in 1977. I met the editors of *Unearth* there, and I just handed them a story, and they just bought it, which was rather astonishing to me at the time. This didn't qualify me to join SFWA, however. That didn't happen for another year or so.

Thrust: You've probably come into the science fiction scene more from the outside than a lot of people. How do you find your relationship with fandom affects your writing?

Many writers insist things get incestuous after a while.

Sucharitkul: Ah, yes, that question. This is rather funny that you should say that, because many of the other science fiction writers tell me that they're envious of me for having been in fandom. But actually I haven't been in it that long. And I'm almost the only person I know who goes to fandom as a relaxation from the weirdness of his world, where I can find people of more relative normalcy than, for instance, in contemporary music fandom, which is to regular fandom what fandom is to the man in the street. I imagine, in terms of relative strangeness.

Thrust: Do you ever put this strangeness into science fiction, or would nobody believe it?

Sucharitkul: I've disguised a lot of things as science fiction which everybody has swallowed whole.

Thrust: Where does this fit into your theory of science fiction?

Sucharitkul: As we all know, theories only come into their own after the artifacts they're talking about are well buried. People didn't discover the rules of Classical music until well into the Romantic period. Mozart never knew that he was obeying or breaking rules at the time. He just did it because it sounded right. So I'm not going to comment on that.

Thrust: Don't you think that all this academic theorizing could embalm science fiction?

Sucharitkul: No, because I think the good bits will be preserved and the rubbish will be ignored, except by the people who are perpetrating it, but what do they matter?

Thrust: The good bits of the theorizing or the good bits of the science fiction?

Sucharitkul: The theorizing. There are good bits floating around somewhere. Sturgeon's Law also holds true of academic tracts. What would be interesting would be to discover an academia of academia, with a bunch of people whose sole function was to analyze the academic writings on science fiction and extract paradigms out of the paradigms.

Thrust: Wouldn't that be twice as orgasm-inducing?

Sucharitkul: Definitely so. I could imagine myself doing well in that. I remember one paradigm I made very well. I was at a world conference on Southeast Asian aesthetics, which was put on by Cornell. There were 25 great experts and two Asian artists. In my paper I compared the Asian composer to a crystal type with five crystalline axes, which were types of polarities. That was really fun, especially as I was able to say in the paper, something like "As every schoolboy knows..." and it was something that none of them knew. About crystalline axes. Academics do love to be insulted though, because every academic knows in his heart of hearts that he is not one.

Thrust: You mentioned your broad pantheon a while back. What do you specifically admire in modern science fiction?

Sucharitkul: Modern science fiction is obviously the only vital field in literature, he said, very portentously. It is the true brainchild of the new wave of the early 20th Century, and all the other stuff is just sterile mules born of this strange hybridization, he ad-libbed. The two other great theories of science fiction, aside from my own, are both theories that I subscribe to. There is the Delany theory, which concerns the literization of metaphors. Obviously very important. Clearly language has been completely revitalized by science fiction. And here of course I refer only to good science fiction. Then there's the Le Guin

theory of science fiction, which is that science fiction is reality. It's the most precise and profound way of paradigmizing the human condition. I think that's very true.

Thrust: Is it really necessary to paradigmize the human condition in everything you write?

Sucharikul: Well, if it's art it is.

Thrust: Are you defining art then as that which paradigmizes the human condition?

Sucharikul: No, but that's a good working definition, I mean, it covers most things. You want me to define art? Okay. Since all experience is subjective, art is essentially a way of communicating that which of its essence cannot be communicated, by means of symbol. That's it. That's my definition.

Thrust: I assume you mean it cannot be communicated by any other means than by symbol.

Sucharikul: Yeah.

Thrust: Delaney would probably write a whole book on that sentence, explaining the basic paradigm for the ambiguities of that sentence.

Sucharikul: Well, I dedicate this sentence to Chip Delaney, whom I have never met. He also belongs to my pantheon, so he can have it. [Pause.] Now do you want me to define the human condition?

Thrust: Yes, please do.

Sucharikul: I don't know the answer to that one. It's very hard to define the human condition unless you're god, because you can't see everything from outside. As human you can only be on the roller coaster. You can't perceive the roller coaster.

Thrust: That's very profound. Have you ever thought of becoming a guru?

Sucharikul: Yes, frequently. At night I have long fantasies about sitting on a gigantic lotus and explaining the meaning of life to a whole lot of naked, attractive, young people.

Thrust: You know, there may be more money in that than in science fiction.

Sucharikul: I'm working on it, though. You see, I've already reached the pinnacle of the Neo-Asian Post-Seriatist composers, and I am searching for a new height to scale. Of course there are only three other Neo-Asian Post-Seriatist composers, but it was good practice to climb that particular mountain.

Thrust: How many other Neo-Asian Post-Seriatist science fiction writers are there?

Sucharikul: I haven't done a survey, but I have a sneaking suspicion that I may be the only one. I'm not sure that there are that many composers who are academically seriously regarded, who also write science fiction. I've never heard of one.

Thrust: As long as you're dispensing eternal truths and the like, what would be your advice to all the would-be writers out there who are reading this?

Sucharikul: Don't.

Thrust: Why not?

Sucharikul: It is only because I have been through a great deal of anguish and pain that I am able to sit here giggling into this microphone so unselfconsciously.

Thrust: Obviously then, the secret of true art is to be unself-conscious and to be aware of it.

Sucharikul: That's it. Here's another paradoxical paradigm of the human condition. You obviously shouldn't become a writer unless you absolutely know that you really are one. Most societies contain many socially self-effacing mechanisms which tend to undermine anybody's attempts to saying anything that goes "Me, me, me." Especially Asian societies. In Thailand there is no real concept of the creative artist in the language. There are all sorts of other strange concepts that you don't have in English, but we won't go into that. That's a barrier you have to overcome. You can't know ultimate reality. You must at least have grasped a little shred of it some-

where. I think that's very important.

Thrust: You mentioned once that you found that the most profound concepts of Buddhism were being confirmed by atomic physics.

Sucharikul: There is a lot of California physics going on these days. The virtual particle. What a wonderful thing that is. That is so Buddhist that it isn't true. Then there are things that exist so fast that they don't have time to exist. Isn't that wonderful? If it weren't for modern physics, almost all of my science fiction would only be fantasy. When you think of the mysticism that's innate in modern physics, think of *rubber* modern physics. There's a real mine for any science fiction writer.

Thrust: It seems to me that science fiction is almost inherently mystical. How many SF stories can you think of — and not just the *Star Trek* movie — end with someone achieving transcendence?

Sucharikul: If I could fuck V'ger and become the universe, I would probably not do so, because I would think being the universe would be very boring. There wouldn't be anything else to try to be. However, I notice that they also became the universe in *Black Hole*. Sort of. At least the villain went to Hell and everybody else became the universe, and it was all one. Of course, science fiction embodies much of the mythology of 20th Century Western culture. The science fiction community doesn't necessarily partake of this mythology. UFOs and angels are very much the same, I think.

Thrust: Science fiction has taken over large areas that used to be the exclusive domain of religion. Eschatology. This would be a reason for its innate mysticism, even in the hard science writers. Like Arthur Clarke.

Sucharikul: Yes, very much so. You want a profound comment? Let's see, hold on while I ramble... Is science fiction religion? No.

Thrust: I mean more a case of secularizing the subject matter of religion without getting rid of it. The same way physicists and the like have been stealing subject matter from philosophers since ancient times.

Sucharikul: Yes, science fiction has stolen a lot of the numinosity from religion. Obviously space is far more imposing than any cathedral. You can't write a space opera set in a cathedral. Actually I'd like to try that sometime.

Thrust: Yes, how about an Inquest space opera set in a cathedral?

Sucharikul: Well, the Inquest series uses a lot of the furniture of space opera. I'm very consciously paying tribute to it. But I'm also trying to write real stories. It's actually very difficult.

Thrust: We're close to the end here... Let's see: WHAT IS THE FINAL QUESTION?

Sucharikul: I have a comment to make on that. You see at Cambridge they had these essay questions on exams. There was a three hour exam, and you'd go in and turn over the piece of paper, and there would be one question. It could be anything whatever, and you had to write a three hour paper. One year the question was: THIS IS THE QUESTION; WHAT IS THE ANSWER? And somebody wrote, "This is the answer; what was the question?" And walked out of the room. He was flunked. But I think this was because of his other performances. If he had been very good, he might have passed. I like to think of myself as one of the other people in that exam room.

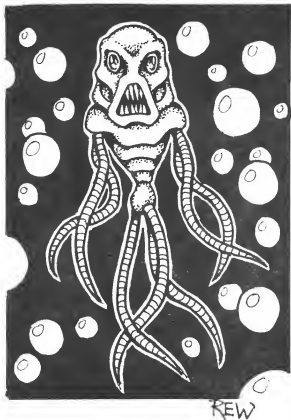
Thrust: Like writing stories giving the answers when you don't know what the question is?

Sucharikul: Right. I don't want to know what the question is. But, as I just said, science fiction is reality. What more can you want?

Thrust: You could want the meaning of life.

Sucharikul: It's in the dictionary.

STIRRING UP THE NATIVES



Grant Carrington

How many times have you heard a writer claim, either explicitly or by implication, that writing is just as hard as any other art? So many people think writing is easy, the argument usually goes, because everybody (at least in the U.S.) knows how to write, so they sit down and write something absolutely dreadful, peppered with grammatical and spelling errors, and expect to have no trouble getting it published. The implication

is that people don't expect to sit down and play the guitar like Segovia or Eric Clapton immediately; people don't expect to put out drawings like Rembrandt, Picasso, or even William de Koonings the first time they try to draw something (though there are quite a few who feel perfectly capable of putting out a Mark Rothko, should the urge ever strike them). The same could be said for composing music, doing sculpture, or ballet or any other kind of theatrical dancing.

Why is it that everyone feels he can be a writer, without any additional training?

Perhaps because it's often true.

There are quite a few writers who sneer at the idea of writers' workshops and conferences. Admittedly, there are good reasons to sneer at them. A writers' workshop (where the participants work over each others' manuscripts, with perhaps a "professional" writer as leader) can turn into a trashing session, with everyone trying to tear everyone else apart rather than trying to provide helpful criticism. Cliques can form easily and tender feelings can be hurt unnecessarily. Also, the criticism can revolve too closely around the pro's criticisms, with the others vying for his/her approval. Most of the participants of workshops, moreover, are not experienced enough to offer valid criticism. They need to be trained as to what is genuine criticism and what is merely opinion.

If writers' workshops can be frequently useless, writers' conferences are almost always so. These are those sessions (usually sponsored by a college or university) wherein several "famous" writers and poets are called on-campus to give a series of lectures for absurd fees. If lucky, for an additional fee, the writers will criticize the participants' manuscripts. In any case, the "information flow" is primarily in one direction, with very little feedback from the participants. Writers' conferences are great opportunities for high school English teachers to get additional credits for their portfolios, but they are just about useless to anyone who wants to be a gen-you-wine writer. (In their defense, it might also be said that writers' conferences rarely do much to bruise the writer's over-sensitive ego, whereas a poor writers' workshop can utterly destroy a writer who is too sensitive.)

(This does not include the confusion between the two — often what I've called a writers' conference will be advertised as a writers' workshop, although workshops are rarely billed as conferences.)

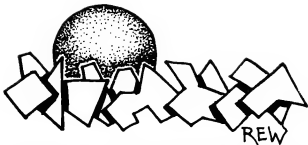
But, as I've said, many professional writers sneer and look down on both conferences and workshops, as well as college writing (creative writing) courses, which are often run by professors of English literature, whose interest run more in the line of symbolism and levels of meaning than on the basics of writing a good story. Even those writing courses taught by published writers are frequently biased toward literary criticism, with anything below the level of Hemingway and Faulkner sneered at.

In short, writers who look down on such sessions have very good reason to do so: workshops and courses that offer genuine value to the prospective young writer are few and far between. But what do these writers offer in return? The young writer should sit down and write; you can't learn how to write from someone else; you've got to sit down and do the work yourself — that's the only way to learn how to write.

To which I say... bullshit!

Let's look at some of the other arts that I've mentioned: most artists spend long years in schools and under other established artists, learning the basics of their craft, learning what has been done in the past, and how it's been done. This is true whether we are talking about advertising artists or more "artistic" artists. Even the maverick Vincent van Gogh came from a family involved with the art business, knew many artists from which he could learn the basics of his craft, and even took a few lessons.

Everyone knows the grind of being a musician: practice, practice, and more practice. Even in their old age, most classical musicians still practice hours each day. And, before they practice, they take lessons and lessons, not only in the art of their own instrument, but also in music theory and related



areas. This is true today, even of many rock musicians, who formerly learned to play in their garages "with cheap instruments and an occasional book. (And even most of those who were "self-taught" learned their first chords and notes from an instruction book, and have continued to learn from interaction with other musicians.)

Of all artists, musical composers are those whose art seems most closely allied to that of writers. Like writers, a part of their art is the passage of time. A musical composition takes time to perform; a story takes time to read. Their art consists in the putting down of mystical black tracks on white paper, and it is up to others (musicians and readers) to translate those black marks into music and words. On the other hand, they are not necessarily performers, although some composers are, especially in the pop music field.

Yet, like musicians, composers spend long hours learning their craft, learning the very *language* of composition, of putting notes on paper, time signatures, rhythms, the limits of the instruments that will perform the music, chords and groups of notes that are "forbidden," that will produce discord and disharmony rather than music (and part of composing is the learning of when to use those forbidden combinations).

In other words, in most of the arts, it is considered an advantage, an essential, to have received considerable training. "Who did you study under?" is not an unusual question for a young artist or musician to be asked.

But it seems to be a mark of dishonor for a writer to have "studied" under another writer. It is expected that a writer will learn his craft primarily on his own hook, without help from others. It's a rare artist or musician who makes on his own without a mentor.

And yet it is remarkably easy for a writer to "make it," compared to an artist or even a musician. The writer is working with his own language usually, the one he grew up with. True, he still needs to learn to write it, to learn at least some of the

rules of its grammar and spelling, but the encyclopedic knowledge of his craft required by a musician or artist is certainly not at all necessary and can even be a drawback.

Most writers, outside of science fiction's incestuous little microcosm, have little contact with other writers and there are quite a few who never meet any other writers at all or even editors, content to do all their business through the mails. And most of them know very little about the mechanics of their own success, technically. They are the obverse of the old phrase, "He who can't, teaches"; "He who can, can't teach."

(Notice how many great athletes are unable to pass their ability on to others. They make poor coaches and managers. What they were able to do, they were able to do naturally. They can't explain it to others. The successful coaches are those who had to struggle their way to the top, learning the hard way what came without thought to the natural athlete.)

This is not to claim that writing is easy. But there are very few writers who put in as much time every day writing as do artists and musicians. (This is, of course, a difficult statement to prove — I am making it from the far-too-many articles I've read in *The Writer* and conversations with other sf writers. It seems to be rare for a writer to actually put in more than four hours a day writing, though there are a few masochists who write eight hours a day or more. And it's not at all uncommon to find a successful writer who writes about two hours a day. The rest of the time, they tell us, however, is spent in *thinking* — a writer is *always* at work, they tell us. Do they think this isn't true of other artists as well?) Even a Rubinstein or Segovia, masters of their instruments, still spend four or five hours a day practicing (like the old joke about Carnegie Hall), and younger artists will spend even more time practicing.

I don't claim that writing is easy. Very few things that are worthwhile come without a lot of work. But it is no stigma or shame for a writer to learn from others, to study under another writer or even a teacher, if that tutor can truly teach him the rudiments of his craft and then its subtleties, and not the bullshit of theme and symbolism and deep significant meanings and all that other New York Literary Establishment LitCrit bullshit.

I have nothing but admiration for artists and musicians. Their work fascinates me — I can watch it and listen to it for hours. But when writers try to imply that they work just as hard, I find it difficult to sympathize. There are a few who work just as hard as other artists, but they are very few and, oddly enough, they never complain about how hard it is to be a writer.

Then again, maybe it's not so odd: they're too busy writing to complain.

EDITORIAL (cont.)

A Star is Born: Those of who read *Analog* probably noticed that one of the characters in the novel serialized in the September through December 1981 issues, **Dragonstar** by David Bischoff and Tom Montealeone, is named **Lee**. Colonel Douglas Fats. Both **Dave** and **Tom** are old friends, and I am pleased and honored to see my name immortalized as the Mission Control Pilot, in a major if not starring role in a darned good, high-adventure SF novel. The paperback should be out soon, and I hope you'll all pick it up.

But who do I want to play me in the movie? (When the script is being written, I'll have to talk to **Dave** and **Tom** — we have to write in a romance for me, and I should go down on missions like Captain Kirk does, and when they come to shoot me, I really should put up a heroic struggle. ...)

The Issue At Hand: It gives me great pleasure this issue to present an article by British SF author David G. Compton. Compton's entrance into SF writing breaks all the clichés, and I think you'll find the story of his atypical career, entering the field through the back door, as fascinating as I did.

Our interviews this issue are a study in contrasts: the first with established professional SF writer and scientist Gregory Benford, the other, of a somewhat more frivolous nature, with new SF writer and avant-garde composer Somtow Sucharitkul. Our only regular columnist to appear this issue is Charles Shel-

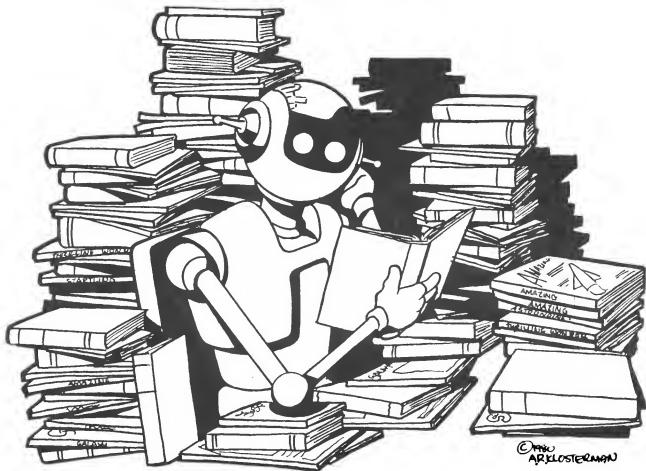
field, who manages to dig up a new angle on looking at everyone's favorite whipping boy: the Gor novel. (For those of you still patiently waiting, Charles still hasn't sold that "most boring job" story... the trustworthiness and integrity of both Charles and this magazine are in serious jeopardy.)

Our smaller type size this issue allow me to squeeze in three more articles, all of which deserve higher billing. Long time SF fan and sometimes-author Rich Brown takes Alexis Budrys to task for his recent column in *F&SF* on fans becoming professionals; Mike Conner, one of SF's young and struggling authors, takes a critical look at rejection slips; and SF author Grant Carrington picks some nits on the art of writing and writing of art. (I also added two cups of reviews and a pinch of letters, and allowed the issue to simmer much too long. ...)

Next Issue: The next issue (#19) will be out in late summer, and will represent the end of our 10th year of publication for *Thrust*! (*Thrust*'s first issue was published in September 1972. For a full history of *Thrust*'s early days, see issue 8, "The Thrust Story"). Next issue will therefore be the "Special 10th Anniversary". Features already scheduled include: an interview with Thomas M. Disch, a long autobiographical piece by Charles Hornig, columnist George Alec Effinger looking at the SF writing game as a betting proposition, an interview with John Varley, lots of book reviews, and more.

And remember to nominate *Thrust* for the Hugo!

— DDF



REVIEWS books, etc.

MOCKINGBIRD by Walter Tevis. (Bantam Books, 1981, 276 p., \$2.95) (ISBN 0-553-14144-9)

I suppose there is nothing bookish people like better than getting together with other bookish people to discuss books; and it is an especially entertaining pastime for science fiction readers who enjoy arguing and fighting amongst themselves regarding the pick of the "best" books of the preceding year. When SF readers to this they are, essentially, trying to offer an educated guess as to the books most likely to be nominated for the coveted Hugo Award. The book that I am about to review will not be nominated for the Hugo, and it very certainly will not win the Hugo award. Nonetheless, I want to make public my opinion—the best science fiction novel published in 1980 was a book titled *Mockingbird* written by a fellow named Walter Tevis.

A reviewer doesn't make a statement like that without a lot of serious consideration and reading. 1980 was a pretty good year for fiction. There were a lot of "big" books written by "big-name" people, and *Mockingbird* was not a big book nor was it written by a big-name author—but it was the best book! It is very easily the finest "re-birth of civilization" novel that I have ever read.

Mockingbird is set in a not-so-very-distant future, in what is left of New York City. The story centers itself around a man, a woman, and a robot. Spofforth is an almost perfect robot; he single-handedly runs the city, but exhibits an obsessive urge to kill himself periodically. Paul Bently is a college professor—which is in and of itself nothing very unusual until one considers the fact that none of his students can read. In fact, no one can read because reading and the intellectual skills needed in order to read have long been forgotten. The guiding principles of the new society focus around fulfillment via privacy. It is immoral to interact with others, and intellectual curiosity has taken a back seat to drugs and and ad agency aphorisms like "Alone is best". As if that isn't bad enough, there are no children and so Bently's generation will be the last generation on earth. In the midst of all this Bently meets Mary Lou, who appears to be the last truly intelligent human being, and fertile female, on the planet. Bently inadvertently learns to read. He teaches Mary Lou to read and while in the process of doing so falls in love with her.

Indeed, *Mockingbird* is a love story. It is a story of hope and love and magic set at the end of the world. It celebrates the written word and the power of imagination and it should hit home

with readers of all persuasions and make us appreciate the knowledge and understanding and cultural heritage available to us in books. **Mockingbird** is striking, memorable, and a joy to read. It is one of the more important literary achievements in the field and everyone who claims interest in science fiction should read it.

Walter Tevis is the author of **The Hustler** and **The Man Who Fell To Earth**, both of which have been made into successful films. **The Hustler** is a story about a pool player; Tevis wrote twelve short stories about pool players before he wrote **The Hustler**, a fine novel. **The Man Who Fell To Earth** first appeared in 1963 and if SF readers know Tevis at all it is because **The Man Who Fell To Earth** was made into a movie in 1976.

Tevis is currently a professor of English and Creative Writing at Ohio State University. He is one of these few who both teach writing and is actually a well known writer. He has already undertaken to write the screenplay version of **Mockingbird** for PBS television. Hopefully we'll be able to see it as well as read it very soon. Also, Doubleday Books will be releasing a collection of short stories by Tevis, titled **Far From Home**, later this year. **Mockingbird** is profound. Go out and buy a copy!

— David Pettus

STAR HAWKS: EMPIRE 99 by Ron Goulart (Playboy Press Books, 1980, \$1.95) (ISBN 0-872-16637-6)

I'd never found time or patience to read the Star Hawks newspaper comic strip, but always took for granted that it must be fairly good, with Ron Goulart writing it. So I read this, the first novel based on the strip—I'll never make the mistake again. Goulart has always been slightly uneven, but this book is ridiculously bad. It isn't good satire, as the subject matter addressed is already self-satirizing. It's ludicrous, it's boring, it's science fiction written for retarded children. Don't bother.

—Doug Fratz

MICROCOSMIC TALES edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander (Taplinger, 1980, 325 pp. \$12.95) (ISBN 0-8008-5238-9)

"The short story is a dying art."

Over the past several decades, story magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, among others, have been fading into oblivion; only a handful of current publications remain which cater to the short story—the women's magazines, for example, and a sparse sampling of detective digests (*Ellery Queen's*, for instance) and a few others make up the last hold-outs. Science fiction magazines have been thriving in recent years and also form a last-ditch source for the short story.

Most authors—regardless of the genre—write novels, not short stories, and readers read them. Novels pay better, have a wider audience, and are also easier to write. The short story—a complex form of literature—requires a greater degree of imagination and creative control. 2000 - 7500 words must strain under excessive pressures to tell plot, theme, and characterization—all with a beginning, middle, and end.

The short-short is a paper-thin (usually only a page or two in length) version of a short story. The short-short—that rarest of literary compositions—is the hardest device to bring off successfully. While stories must strain under wordage limitations, short-shorts are literally crushed by them. To write a good short-short calls for the highest calibre of professionalism—something few writers truly possess.

Frederic Brown—one of SF's most respected luminaries—was the rare writer who performed the short-short with virtuosity. His short-shorts are classics in the genre, having been printed and reprinted innumerable times, even outside SF. William F. Nolan, like Brown, is a master of this genre, as evidenced by his own classics, "The Martians and the Leafdog," "The Beautiful Doll Caper," "Of Time and Texas" and many others. Also, like Brown, Nolan possesses that most delightful of substances: a sense of humor. Most Brown/Nolan short-shorts are cleverly comedic, irony-torn paradoxes—"riotous vignettes."

Both writers, along with many others, are in **Microcosmic Tales**, a collection of clever SF gimmicks, puns, and quickie plots—and fun to read. Nolan has "Death Double", while Brown has "Pattern", "Answer", "Nightmare in Time", and "Blood". Other craftsmen of this art-form are Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Shekley, F.M. Busby and Harlan Ellison, to name a few. Don't look for overly deep characterization, slowly building suspense, or intense narrative atmosphere. These are hoopshots... one hundred, in all. Crispy, mouth-soaked, tasty. Fritos...

Check them out.

(This book is actually the second selection of short-stories by these editors. The first volume, **100 Great Science Fiction Short Short Stories**, contains a totally different array of short-stories—by most of these same authors.)

—John DiPrete

HARPIST IN THE WIND by Patricia A. McKillip (Atheneum, 1979, 252 pp., \$8.95; Del Rey 1980, \$2.25)

In the past five years, there have developed several single-author fandoms that now verge upon being cult religions. In order to be the object of a cult, the author must be not only prolific in one or more series (so that the reader, in prevalence with the customs of the time, can have an extended wallow in an imaginary universe). The series must be overtly romantic and covertly feminist—the feminism due to the currents of our age, the romanticism the sugar that makes the escapism that much easier to swallow. (Male authors do not attract camp-followers in the same manner as female authors. The Dorsai is a service organization, and the Amber Society, if their fanzine is an accurate guide, rarely discusses Zelazny. I know of no one who addresses Zelazny and Dickson as "Father" with the same awe and reverence that Darkover trufen address Marion Zimmer Bradley as "Mother.")

Thus neoromanticism has proven to be a popular form of science-fiction and fantasy in the late seventies; but these neoromantics should not be treated as a block, a cluster of clones conveniently possessed of the same thought and style. Neoromantics range in tone from that blissful optimist, Anne McCaffrey, to the darker, more powerful, visions of C.J. Cherryh. The McKillip novel is a sort of heroic grey, with neither good nor evil prominent.

Patricia McKillip differs from most writers of her sort in that her leading series, the *Riddle of Stars* trilogy, began as unabashed juveniles and ended as thoroughly adult fantasy, albeit with teenage heroes. *Harpist in the Wind* is not a juvenile, as the novel deals with deeper themes than the hero's attempts to achieve his maturity. In *The Riddle-Master of Hed* (1976), Morgon, the Riddle-Master of the title, attempts to reconcile himself with his legacies by vanishing into an icy mountain peak. In the sequel, *Heir of Sea and Fire* (1977), Raederle, Morgon's fiancée, abandons the restrictions of her youth by discarding her body, shape-changing into whatever she sees fit. Thus, by *Harpist in the Wind*, the two major protagonists have both transcended their identities, in effect discarding their juvenile past for whatever more powerful magic is needed to save themselves and their time.

What McKillip is trying to do in *Harpist* is to find a new myth on which heroic fantasy can build. She has chosen a rather Seventies sort of myth, in that the old, globe-conquering visions of Conan and his successors are replaced by something more personal and more finite. If we cannot save the world in our heroic fantasies, we can save ourselves; if we cannot become rulers of the world and masters of the universe, it would be much better to retreat into our bodies, change ourselves into deer, and run back home to the farm and raise pigs. It is a much more personal myth that McKillip has prepared for us, a myth that could have achieved power by its novelty, if nothing else. Unfortunately, McKillip is too busy with the grand effect; the book is too busy, as if McKillip was trying to force together *The Ten Commandments* onto the set of *The Quiet Man*. The plot is too convoluted; spear-carriers leave as fitfully as they enter, and most of the characters serve little purpose save to depress

themselves and the reader.

There are moments of sublime power here; I was particularly impressed by Morgon's passage on a ship full of the dead. But *Harpist in the Wind* is a pastoral poem inflated into a turgid epic, a pearl centered on a necklace of bilge. It apparently impressed enough readers to win a place on the Hugo ballot, an unusual honor for a fantasy. But discerning readers of fantasy should look elsewhere for the entertainment they deserve.

—Martin Morse Wooster

THE CHANGELING, by Roger Zelazny (Ace, 1980, \$6.95) (ISBN 0-441-10256-5)

Now, I like Zelazny. I buy whatever I see that has his name on it, and I've even paid hardback prices because I didn't want to

wait for the paper edition. That's why *The Changeling* was something of a disappointment.

It's not that it's a bad book; it is, in fact, smoothly and cleanly written if lacking something of Zelazny's usual verbal bravura. Like *Jack of Shadows*, which it greatly resembles, it opposes a "scientific," material, mechanistic world against a sorcerous, intuitive and poetic one. Zelazny has done this before, and done it well. He runs into difficulties in *The Changeling*, though, because he really believes that most machinery is mostly mundane.

Take, for example, the description of a park in the "technological" world.

He patted a dusty synthetic tree and crossed the unliving turf past holograms of swaying flowers, to seat

SPOTLIGHT ON ELLISON ● James J.J. Wilson

HARLAN ELLISON SHATTERDAY



"I am always late. Invariable. If I tell you I'll be there to pick you up at 8:30, expect me Thursday. A positive genius for tardiness."

—Harlan Ellison

PAIN GOD AND OTHER DELUSIONS—1965

"It is a hideous experience watching Harlan limbering up for a deadline whose date has already passed."

—Michael Moorcock
NEW WORLDS—1979

Harlan Ellison is obsessed with time. It is no wonder then that so many of his stories deal with the concept in one way or another. One such story, "Repent Harlequin!" Said The Ticktockman", was also a turning point in Ellison's career. It won the very first Nebula Award of the Science Fiction Writers of America for Best Short Story of 1965 and it won Ellison his first "Hugo" Award. The story deals with one of Ellison's recurring themes: that of a universal scorecard which keeps track of people who waste time and by which they are punished accordingly.

Another story which uses the theme of keeping track of wasted time is "Count The Clock That Tells The Time" which is about a place, a sort of limbo where people and events are if their existence is not relevant to the flow of the universe. In this story, however, this is not a punishment, it is a natural occurrence. Your body wears out; you die. You waste too much

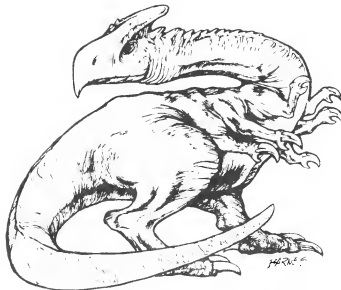
time; you wind up in limbo. A story which is more similar to "Repent Harlequin!" in which wasted time is punished is "Shopper Keeper". This is the story of a race of immortals who, if they waste enough time, are put into suspended animation until someone earns back the time for them.

Another way Ellison deals with time is by having his characters deal with the past in many and various ways. Ellison dealt with his own past in 1959 with "Free With This Box", the story of a little boy who gets in trouble when caught stealing buttons from boxes of PEP cereal. He again writes about his childhood in his 1977, multiple-award-winning story, "Jeffy Is Five". This story is about a boy who has remained a little boy since the 1940s. Ellison has written, "It is both a hard-edged and a romanticized view of the innocence that we all possessed as children. Jeffy has become an image of reverence for the parts of my childhood that were joyous and free of pain". Jeffy is Ellison's dream: to remain innocent and to always be able to enjoy the things he liked as a child, many of which no longer exist. Jeffy is a nightmare though. Ellison realizes, but never completely accepts, that the past must remain in the past. The point he makes, however, is that the wonderful fantasies of the past can never exist in the world of the present. Why, though, can't we have some of the good realities of days gone by? Probably because most haven't learned from the past and, as George Santayana wrote, "Those who cannot learn from the past are condemned to repeat it." Instead of making a better world using the knowledge of the present and of the past, we will continue to make the same mistakes.

In "In The Fourth Year Of The War", Ellison takes revenge on some of the people who did him wrong and those associated with the painful memories of his character's past. The main character of the story is a certifiable schizophrenic as in one of Ellison's top stories, "Shatterday". The story also deals with revenge as does "The Man Who Was Heavily Into Revenge". The main character, driven only by his warped alter-ego, seeks out the "villains" of his past. In "All The Birds Come Home To Roost", however, the main character seems to have far less control over the situation. His past is playing itself in reverse. He is slowly but surely moving toward meeting up with the last person on Earth he ever wants to see again.

Harlan Ellison continues to deal with the theme of time in his stories. Coincidentally, all the stories mentioned above except "Repent Harlequin!" Said The Ticktockman" and "Free With This Box" appear in one book. Ellison has taken these stories, put them together with nine other previously uncollected stories he has written, and published them all in his first major book since 1978, *SHATTERDAY* (Houghton Mifflin, \$11.95). Half the stories in *SHATTERDAY* are award-winners and all but one were published since 1975. In fact, one story, "All The Lies That Are My Life" is one of Ellison's latest stories, having seen publication just barely before the book's publication date.

SHATTERDAY is one of Ellison's best books to date, and he has written quite a few good ones, and I highly recommend it.



himself upon an orange plastic bench. Recordings of birdsongs sounded at random intervals through hidden speakers. Artificial butterflies darted along invisible beams. Concealed aerosols released the odors of flowers at regular intervals.... (p.34)

Sounds awful, right? The young Henry Ford-type from this world has no chance at all against the guitar-playing sorcerer-prince who is his double and his opposite. (Neither of the ubermensch antagonists nor the Obligatory Sex Object have any character. It isn't necessary, but its lack means that they can be reduced to cultural abstractions even when it's unfair. Mostly it's fair enough.) Most of us, including Zelazny, are going to be upset if he and his kind win. The cosmic confrontation between the forces of "science" and "magic" doesn't come off because the author has prejudged the issue. And since the rest of us would rather ride a dragon than re-invent the waterwheel too, we shouldn't carp. Just don't let's pretend it's going to be a fair fight.

—Elizabeth Stanford

NEW VOICES 4, The John W. Campbell Award Nominees, edited by George R.R. Martin. (Berkley, 1981, 262 pp. \$2.25) (ISBN 0-425-05033-5)

I've always been of the opinion that the concept underlying **New Voices** was a truly (and obviously) good one. But as the years have come and gone I've also been led to see that George has forged for himself a double-edged sword with his original collections; true, he gives the best of each year's newer writers another place to showcase their wares, we are availed of the opportunity to follow these fledgling writers several years *after* their initial debuts, and so far more than one has gone on to become a solid star and George has, by the very nature of his endeavor, therefore, been able to publish (for instance) more than one original piece by the likes of a John Varley—which can only help.

But on the other hand there has been at least one author who has left the genre (Alan Brennert) whom George has had to coax into writing for **New Voices** at the appropriate time (NV#3), and one who has since died—Tom Reamy.

Overall, the collections have been solid; I can't remember having read a bona fide turkey, and there have been several sterling pieces to be sure. And this volume is no exception.

John Varley, M.A. Foster, Arlen Darnay, Joan Vinge, and Tom Reamy just can't a poor book make. Varley and Foster just blew me away with their colorful, imaginative worlds and the sensitivity with which they treat their unique characters (and "Entertainment" by Foster is his first piece of short fiction!).

Varley's "Blue Champagne" is, alas, one I won't discuss because I fear talking too much. Suffice it to say that it will (timid prediction!) appear on award ballots, and deservedly so.

Darnay and Vinge ("The Pilgrimage of Ishten Telen Haragosh" and "Psiren" respectively) are probably not of award stature, but that is definitely not a slight against them. "Psiren" is a sequel to a forthcoming novel *Psion*, and deals with a telepathist who has lost his powers because he was involved in a murder, and how a strange off-world Dreamweaver aids, if not totally successfully, in the difficult emotional catharsis of this "crippled" mind-reader while he endeavors to extricate her from mental slavery/drugs. A very good piece, come to think of it.

And, finally, "M is for the Million Things" by Tom Reamy—unfortunately the other side of the double-edged sword mentioned earlier, like Socrates (if you will) pleading his case before the 500 in Athens, I shan't resort to *ad misericordiam* and tell you how close Tom and George were, or how shaken-to-the-bone George was when Tom passed away, or how at a loss George was for a story from Tom to round out this volume. No, I won't. I will only say that "M" is typical Reamy, very early Reamy, very short and not his best, but that if such things can be put in such terms, George has managed to pull the fat out of the fire with a fine article on Tom's too-few works by Algis Budrys, appropriately following Tom's story and closing the book. Well done.

George's introduction to the book, author notes prefacing each story, and A.E. van Vogt's general preface, along, of course, with the fine package between the covers, makes **New Voices IV** a definite must in the original anthology division.

—David Truesdale

WORLD ENOUGH, AND TIME by James Kahn. (Del Rey/Ballantine, 1980, 340 pp. \$2.25) (ISBN 0-345-29247-2)

"Coyness is our prerogative in this universe—here there is world enough, and time, for all things."

James Kahn certainly thinks so. In his first science fantasy novel, he includes centaurs, griffins, vampires, hobbits, elves, gargoyles, harpies, hermaphrodites, sirens, humans, neoromans (bionic hybrid) and assorted talking animals—not to mention a quest, romance and chapter headings like "In Which The Travelers Learn Of A New Animal In The South." And all this, against a post Holocaust California, wherein the Ice encroaches nearer every year....

Wonderful stuff. Classical mythology collides with science—and turns out to be delicious fun. Genetic engineering has provided the fanciful creatures but the magic of fantasy is still prevalent through the gentle naivety of a main character who believes as a Scribe (a Secret Order, by the way), that some day he will discover the First Word ever spoken.

The plot, of course, concerns a quest of three friends, a centaur named Beauty, the Scribe named Joshua and a female neoroman named Jasmine. The trio starts off to avenge the murder of most of Joshua's family and to rescue his wife and brother as well as Beauty's wife. They have been kidnapped by a griffin, a vampire and an Accident (genetic mutant) apparently directed by an ominous, newly evolved or developed animal in the South. However the trio ends up realizing that vengeance is a sorry substitute for enlightenment and that love is all. (Or something sentimental like that.)

Admittedly, the style is sometimes purple and overeager, but overall, the characters are quite enjoyable. Hopefully by the next book (sequel coming), Kahn will have pared down his prose. But I do hope he continues developing a certain absurd quality that ran throughout the book, for instance, in the creation of a cat totally certain of her powers to charm, dedicated to her master but smooth as they come. For example, a moment from the cat's viewpoint: "She narrowed her eyes into slits, and imagined herself carrying the coveted Humans in her teeth all the way back to her beloved Joshua, to drop them at his feet: a present. How he would love her then! THEN she would be appreciated." And this cat is named Ibis and yes, she is black.

Although **World Enough And Time** does not feel absolutely

original, the enjoyment factor is undeniably high. It's perfect for light reading. There is a trilogy planned, but the first novel stands on its own and does not leave the reader with a cliff hanger.

It is not standard science fiction, however and Del Rey should be applauded for discovering this new fantasist.

—Melissa Mia Hall

DREAM MAKERS by Charles Platt (Berkley Books, 1980, 284 pp., \$2.75) (ISBN 0-425-04668-0)

In *Dream Makers*, Charles Platt has assembled an entertaining and insightful cluster of profiles/interviews. In fact, this is the best book of its type yet to appear.

There are 29 SF writers profiled here: Asimov, Disch, Sheckley, Vonnegut, Stine, Sainrad, Pohl, Denney, Malzberg, Bryant, Bester, Kornbluth, Budrys, Farmer, Van Vogt, Dick, Ellison, Bradbury, Herbert, Knight, Wilhelm, Moorcock, Ballard, Tubb, Watson, Brunner, Benford, Silverberg and Aldiss. Platt has strayed from the traditional method of fashionable in current magazines of merely transcribing without comment from a tape. (A sample of one of Platt's profiles appeared in SFR 36; Philip K. Dick.) This is where his interviews become true profiles—as he interjects personal observations regarding the individual in question: the context of each session is fleshed out too.

An Appendix ("Right of Reply") also appears at the volume's end. Often, rather than modify a comment or observation, Platt instead gave his interviewees "right of reply". Very few took advantage of this "right"—perhaps indicative of the accuracy of observation and comment. Eight writers did, however, feel the impulse to set the record straight on minor points—as in Ian Watson's retort that it was unfair to characterize him as an Oxford academic, "because he hates Oxford and has now moved to a small village in a totally different part of the country."

Does it matter that Barry Malzberg lives in a middle-American suburb? Or that Ellison lives in a Disneyland of his own pop ego? Or that Ed Bryant has lived for months at a time on food purchased with Master Charge from a Denver grocery? Or that Budrys tightens the arm of his spectacles during Platt's visit by extracting the precise jeweller's screwdriver from a box of large selection of such in his basement?

In not, then why do I find this trivia fascinating?

It is because, as Platt notes in reference to a completely different topic in his Introduction, everything depends on and influences everything else. Those of us interested in the SF field can surely see rays shining from the writer in many directions: to his personality, to his lifestyle, to his writing, to our own perceptions of his writing, and thus, to our perceptions of our own lives.

Berkley Books is to be congratulated for buying this book, and Platt for compiling it. I would like to think that both Berkley and Platt might take heart from comments such as mine and get working on a second volume like this one.

—Terrence M. Green

DRAGON'S EGG by Robert L. Forward (Ballantine Books, 1981, 309 pp., \$2.75) (ISBN 0-345-28349-X)

Is there such a thing as a hard-science fantasy? Fantasy as a word immediately conjures up sword and sorcery epics. It can also mean something so incredible that there is no way anyone can believe it could ever exist. Hard science, on the other hand usually describes something in such meticulously realized detail, that you are quite willing to concede it may just be around the corner. In *Dragon's Egg*, we find a rare combination of these two forms.

In a very special way, there is a nodding resemblance to Hal Clement's classic *Mission of Gravity*, but this world is even more fantastic than anything even he described. *Dragon's Egg* is a neutron star contained matter incredibly compressed, a surface gravity 67 billion times that of the earth with a magnetic field 2 trillion times stronger than our own. Nothing could exist on such a surface—right? Wrong! Not only does life exist, but intelligent life capable of developing cultures and science. No matter that it

is utterly alien, rather resembling a disc shaped blob of mercury with twelve eyes; it is human in that its culture goes through the same type of historic convulsions as our own. The neutron star was detected by earth in the year 2020 and an expedition arrives in orbit around it some thirty years later.

Contact with such creatures would be difficult enough with all of the immense gravitational and magnetic forces, but there is yet another problem—time. Time for the cheela (the alien race) passes at a rate roughly one million times faster. Thus, the average life span in human terms is exactly 15 minutes. But, contact is made, and how it is done is a tale in itself. When the humans arrive at the star, the cheela are at a level approximating our Middle Ages. Earlier, we have observed them passing through the Neolithic and agricultural stages before the humans reach Dragon's Egg. The big question is what will happen when they reach an equivalent level of technology as the observers, and then surpass it? The micro-world theme is a fascinating one and has rarely been employed as skillfully as it is here. The one example I can recall is *Edge of Time*, a 1958 novel by David Grinnell.

There is also a 23 page technical appendix giving the details of the world Forward has created. It is so meticulous that even a pro like Larry Niven has admitted that he could not have written such a book as it requires too much scientific accuracy for him! The difficulty with works that are highly technical in scope is that they do not move or flow, and the reader soon gets bored. However, this book is doubly awesome in that it reads very easily and moves at a fast clip. It is a book that John W. Campbell Jr. would have loved. The author is a senior scientist at Hughes Research Labs in California and carries some impressive credentials. For a scientist and a first novelist, he writes good science fiction. I hope we will be hearing from him—though where he ever gets the time to write in the midst of his voluminous duties is another great mystery.

It is refreshing to see such carefully conceived detail. No wonder it has received praise from such S.F. greats as Frank Herbert, Isaac Asimov and Hal Clement.

If you like hard-science fiction, you won't want to miss this one. But even if you are a technological illiterate, you can still enjoy the scope and grandeur of the concepts. This book is a real winner.

—W. Ritchie Benedict

Mark Rose's new book has universal appeal.

Mark Rose's lucid study of science fiction deals in a fascinating way with the basic themes of the genre. He sets the key to science fiction as mark's meeting with the unknown—the alien—and how he handles it. This continuing theme is the cornerstone of science fiction as a fiction's reality. It is the story between the invention of free will and the knowledge of determinism as a displacement of eventually religious concepts, and as a kind of various aspects of the scientific necessity of the modern world.

This book will argue both scientific and scientific fiction's life in the future.

Harvard University Press

21 Garden Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

FIRESTARTER by Stephen King. (The Viking Press, 1980, 428 pp. \$13.95) Science Fiction Book Club Edition

Just recently, Stephen King withdrew his novel, **The Dead Zone**, from the list of contenders for the 1980 World Fantasy Award. Kings says that **The Dead Zone** is science fiction, rather than fantasy. And for what it's worth, I agree with him. Very likely, King will do the same thing with **Firestarter** when it is nominated next year. And it will be nominated; it is a very fine novel.

Of course, King has established himself as a top notch writer in the horror genre with books like **Carrie**, **Salem's Lot**, and , and numerous shorter works that have appeared in magazines since the mid-seventies. But King is changing directions; he began changing directions with the publication of **The Stand**, and end-of-the-world novel that offered readers a happy mixture of fantasy and science fiction, in 1978. Then came **The Dead Zone**, leaning more

heavily in the direction of Science fiction, and now, **Firestarter**, which is a science fiction novel that John Campbell himself would have bought for serialization in **Analog** ten years ago.

Will King be writing space opera next?? No one can say, but some things never change. King still writes about good and evil. In **Firestarter** the good guys are Andy McGee and Vicky Tomlinson. They participate in a drug experiment conducted by a sleazy bunch of government scientists and later discover that the experiment has somehow altered them. Andy and Vicky are suddenly psychic, they can glimpse the future and communicate telepathically. They fall in love and get married. They have a child, a girl, and name her Charlie. And they begin to suspect something is amiss when Charlie sets her teddy bear on fire, just by looking at it.

By the time Charlie is eight years of age, she doesn't start fires so often; her parents have taught her that it is a bad thing, this pyrokinesis, and they have encouraged her to keep it under control.

ON THE REFERENCE SHELF ● ● ● Doug Fratz

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW INDEX, 1974-1979 by H.W. Hall (Gale Research, 1981, 391pp., \$78.00) (ISBN 0-8103-1107-0)

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM, Volume 19 by Sharon R. Guntton (Gale Research, 1981, 500 + pp., \$68.00) (ISBN 0-8103-0121-0)

DICTIONARY OF LITERARY BIOGRAPHY, VOLUME 8: 20th-CENTURY AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS (Gale Research, 1981, 2 volumes, 652pp., \$124.00) (ISBN 0-8103-0918-1)

THE COMPLETE INDEX TO ASTOUNDING/ANALOG by Mike Ashley (Robert Weinberg Publications, 1981, 253pp., \$29.95) (ISBN 0-934498-07-5)

ANATOMY OF WONDER by Neil Barron (R.R. Bowker, 1981, 724pp., \$32.95) (ISBN 0-8352-1404-4)

THE INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORY OF LITTLE MAGAZINES AND SMALL PRESSES (Dustbooks, 1981, 552pp., \$15.95) (ISBN 0-913218-66-9)

THE STELLAR GAUGE by Michael J. Tolley & Kirpal Singh (Norstrilia Press, 1980, 288pp., price unknown) (ISBN 0-909106-08-8)

THE SCIENCE FICTION REFERENCE BOOK by Marshall B. Tymn (Starmont House, 1981, 536pp., \$14.95) (ISBN 0-916732-24-X)

STARMONT READER'S GUIDES (Numbers 1-8) by Roger C. Schlobin (Starmont House, 1980, 64-80pp., \$3.95 per volume)

A HISTORY OF THE HUGO, NEBULA AND INTERNATIONAL FANTASY AWARDS by Donald Franson & Howard DeVore (Misfit Press, 1981, 141pp., \$5.00)

1980 and 1981 were once again good years for SF reference volumes, primarily once again those aimed at the academic researcher as opposed to the fan or reader. I've been tough on academic writers and editors in the past, but I must admit that I've seen the academic community improve somewhat in the last few years in their understanding of science fiction and the quality of their reference books.

Three major works were released by Gale Research Company this year. H.W. Hall's **Science Fiction Book Review Index, 1974-1979** is one that anyone working in the field of science fiction and literary criticism and commentary will find indispensable. The index cites by author/book all reviews in 250 literary sources, including many fanzines. (Strangely, Hall cites Thrust only from 1978 and 1979, ignoring issues 4 through 9, from 1974-1977.) Quite unfortunately, this index is available only in an overpriced hardcover edition, obviously aimed at libraries. At \$15.00 in trade-sized paperback, I think this would be a good seller among fandom's many writers.

Contemporary Literary Criticism, of which this is the 19th volume, is of much less direct interest to those whose literary interests are centered mainly on SF. This is an ongoing collection of quotes from current literary criticism on various authors, including a surprising (and gratifying) number of SF authors. Recommended for academic literary libraries only.

Volume 8 of Gale's **Dictionary of Literary Biography** is of American SF writers, and actually appears as two hard-cover volumes. The books feature short, but primarily well-written, bio-

ographies of ninety 20th Century SF authors. One would present the usual quibbles regarding those chosen and those not chosen for this volume. (Very notable writers not chosen include Benford, Bishop, Bova, Cherry, Hogan, George Martin, McIntyre, Varley and Vinpe.) In addition to the biographies, there are several articles included as appendices: a surprisingly good piece on SF's New Wave, a shallow look at science fantasy, fairly good pieces on SF art, SF paperbacks and SF films, an incredibly bad piece on fandom and conventions by someone without the least bit of understanding of either ("Frequently, professional science fiction writers can supplement their incomes by touring the convention circuit."), a very good article on fanzines, and the obligatory Hugo/Nebula listings, among others. This is an important acquisition for libraries, but once again not priced for individuals.

From Robert Weinberg comes an excellent research tool, **The Complete Index to Astounding/Analog** by Mike Ashley. It's exactly what the title says, and attractively hardbound, a must for libraries and serious researchers.

Two major general SF reference books were published in 1981: **The Science Fiction Reference Book**, edited by Marshall Tymn, and **Anatomy of Wonder**, a new second edition of the earlier volume, edited by Neil Barron. Both of these books are highly valuable for their up-to-date information for researchers (lists of libraries, publisher addresses, book dealers, research references, etc.). Both books are musts for libraries. For individual writers and fans, the Tymn book is surprisingly good, and for the price is an excellent volume.

For fans of small press books, there is **The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses**. I was surprised to note that in the subject index under science fiction are listed 73 small book and magazine (fanzine) publishers, including only 28 of which I have heard, and not including many of the major SF small presses in fandom. I take it the rest of these are small publishers who dabble in some SF.

The Starmont Reader's Guide series has now published at least eight volumes on eight SF writers (Clarke, Bester, Farmer, Haldeman, Herbert, Leiber, Sturgeon and Zelazny). These books are aimed, seemingly, at sf readers who want to know enough about one of the authors to choose other books and stories to read, but they contain much too much detail for that minor purpose. And yet they fall far short of providing comprehensive information on those authors; with only a slightly greater length, they could have provided definitive bibliographies, both primary and secondary. I've concluded that these books must be aimed at the college market, to allow students and professors not highly familiar with SF to pretend they are. As such, they fall short for knowledgeable fans, either as informative reading or comprehensive reference.

Last, from Australia comes a very interesting but overlooked little book, **The Stellar Gauge**, with essays on various authors, U.S. and British, by, primarily, British SF authors and Australian academics, and from Howard DeVore, **A History of the Hugo, Nebula and International Fantasy Awards** remains the favorite inexpensive reference on SF awards.

Enter the bad guys. The Shop is a secret government organization and the head-honcho is a sly, crafty fellow named Cap Hollister. Cap has determined that Charlie may just be the "ultimate weapon" that America has been waiting for all these years, and hires an evil man named Rainbird to capture the girl and her father. Rainbird is preoccupied with death, and what it "feels" like to die. He is a nasty man and doesn't like being crossed by his inferiors.

King has an acute sense of the visual. One can see the characters and events that King writes about; and this has much to do with his being so successful in selling the film rights to his novels. His writing is always competent, with good plot development and dialogue, and he has proven himself many times over as a stylist.

More than anything else, however, King's books are always entertaining, and that is the name of the game when it comes right down to it. Entertainment.

King's newest book is well worth your time and money.

— David Pettus

WHAT IF? Volume 2, edited by Richard A. Lupoff (Pocket Books, 1981, 239 pp., \$2.50) (ISBN 0-671-83190-9)

Every science fiction anthology editor lets his own personal definitions of what "quality" is intrude when compiling any "best of" story selections. In the second of a planned three-part presentation of the stories that "should have won" science fiction's achievement award, the Hugo, Lupoff proves that tastes in the SF differ as much as any other genre.

Lupoff would be hard-put to find the "definitive quality" selection, yet here he has found the best for your money. Because he believes those who read SF and enjoy it are unfortunate nationalists. They aren't aware of SF being published anywhere else but America. Great Britain, France, and Germany are ignored. Britain's *New Worlds* or *Ad Astra* magazines are overlooked in Hugo balloting. Thus, Lupoff thinks it's his duty to bring those stories that were ignored into view with this second book.

Lupoff blames other things—unevenness in the amount or quality published in a given year, or too much competition—for the variance in "quality." Consider Alfred Bester's 1959 story, "The Pi Man" which was placed next to the powerful Hugo contender in the same year, Daniel Keyes' "Flowers for Algernon." Keyes' story won. But Lupoff believes Bester's story also deserved a Hugo.

Lupoff examines the balloting from 1959 to 1965 in his notes. The book contains the lush "Where Is the Bird of Fire?" by Thomas Burnett Swann. Also included are the very worthy "Stand-by" by Philip K. Dick and a *New Worlds* story from 1965, the thought-provoking "All the King's Men" by Barrington J. Bailey.

If you think you're *Missing Something* and feel guilty besides, read **WHAT IF?** The notes and historical commentary by Lupoff alone are worth the book's price.

— Andrew Andrews

MANIFEST DESTINY by Barry B. Longyear, (Berkley Books, 1980, 245 pp., \$2.25)

It is always a delight to discover a new talent. **Manifest Destiny** has introduced us to a writer that will be "established", a "big-name" in every sense of the word, in only a very short time if he continues to write science fiction, for he does it very well.

Manifest Destiny is a collection of novellas, tied together by brief interludes which help to enhance and elaborate upon the universe that Longyear has created for us. Unlike a number of books which have attempted to do this kind of thing, **Manifest Destiny** works. There are four novellas; three of them have already appeared in print, with one of them in print here for the first time. "The Jaren" first appeared in the fall, 1979 issue of Isaac Asimov's *Science Fiction Magazine*, under the pseudonym Frederick Longbeard. "Enemy Mine" appeared in the September issue of the same magazine as being written by Barry B. Longyear. "Savage Planet" first appeared in the February, 1980 issue of *Analogue*.

"The Jaren" is a well written story that illustrates the fact that winning and losing is a relative thing. "Enemy Mine" is on this year's Hugo ballot, and is a finely constructed tale about the development of friendship between man and alien. "Savage Planet" is, perhaps, the story I like least of the four, possibly due to the fact that it puts mankind in a bad light... the truth hurts. It is, nonetheless, a well told story about mankind's "manifest destiny" to expand, and destroy everything in its collective path. My choice for best story here is "USE Force", which is a futuristic war story in the tradition of Haldeman's **The Forever War** and **Mindbridge**.

Barry Longyear is off to a very successful start.

— David Pettus

conner—cont. from page 19

business correspondence? Ah, but this magazine is *being gentle* with you, empathizing with you until it hurts. In return, they expect you to continue thinking highly of them (thus the subscription blank). Admittedly, Mr. Scithers' material does make interesting reading—the first time it comes. By the third or fourth batch, it's kicking a dead dog. *Asimov's* should save the stuff for the submissions that truly need it, like the ones with no postage on the return envelope.

Mr. Scithers also has other goodies which he sends along from time to time. One, which has a prominent place on my "best-of" pile, is postcard-sized. Like much of *Asimov's* stationery, it features a cute cartoon—this one of an alien in a postal uniform standing agape underneath an open mailbox as a dark tentacle slithers forth (awfully fantasy-oriented, I'd say) clutching an envelope which, judging from the way lines drawn above, emits some sort of preternatural stench. The card itself reads:

SEX?

Sure—sex is a part of life; it's absolutely essential for many an important story-idea—but for us, basically, it's a *part*, not the whole thing. Straight-sex-for-arousal's sake almost always belongs in another market than ours, and we have a strong bias against sex-and-sadism. (For that matter, we're just as unhappy with sexless sadism...) As for the "vulgar" four-letter words for the act and the organs of sex, we think any competent writer can easily say what is to be said without them.

Well twist my weenie! I will admit that, in the first three paragraphs of the story which elicited this response, my hero was getting a blow job from a woman hanging upside down on a trapeze. But this was an integral *part* of the story! (The hero was a pilot whose dreams were being sabotaged to foul up his reaction time.) And it was a *dream* sequence anyway! But putting the question of whether the story deserved rejection aside, why on earth would an editor think it necessary to send such messages of explanation? If the "straight-sex-for-arousal's-sake" caused the story to fail, then fine, it didn't work, send a simple *re* and be done with it. If it's the writer's job to figure out the reason. After all, an editor reads tons of garbage every week. In return, he should trust his contributors to be man or woman enough to take a clear, crisp, thank you and unfortunately. Empathy is a poor substitute for cash, friends.

We writers take our lumps.

I have resolve to take action. No longer will I sit idly by to suffer the slings and arrows of editorial petulance. Now, I have my own set of 3x5 cards, and they read:

Dear Editor:

We have read the enclosed rejection slip. Unfortunately, it does not meet the present mood of the author.

Best of luck with another chump.

THE AUTHOR

You gotta keep your dignity somehow.

NO WONDER THE LAST
ISSUE DIDN'T GET
ANY LETTERS!
I TURNED MY
WHOLE MAILING
LIST INTO
FROGS.



Counter-Thrusts LETTERS

Robert Bloch
2111 Sunset Crest Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90046

Thrust #17 was certainly worth waiting for and I want to thank you for all the enjoyment and enlightenment you compressed into its pages. Lou Stathis seemed right on target with his analysis of book and record marketing psychology. I can attest that the same situation applies to film and television—there is no middle ground, no such thing as a happy medium. TV is either two people sitting in chairs, one getting paid for asking questions and the other answering for free, or else it's an obscenely over-priced series segment or special. Films are either cheap exploitation quickies or forty-million-dollar monstrosities. The same conglomerate mentality prevails. I've no solution, but it's truly abominable.

Elizabeth Harper
1419 W. Cheyenne Road
Colorado Springs, CO 80906

What do you say to someone you don't know who pays you a great compliment? Some how saying "thank you" just doesn't seem to be very much. Some friends of mine in Kansas City saw your review of *Orbit 21* in No. 17 Summer 81 issue of *Thrust* and called to tell me about your very kind words about my story "Survivors."

I am honored by what you say and very pleased you read it and like it. It is my first sale. I wrote it in a marathon 24 hours at the request of Damon and Kate who had seen some notes I made on a scene of it. I was attending Clarion 79 at the time. Much to my surprise, after submitting it for the last workshop we had, Damon bought it on the spot.

Thank you so much for your mention of me and my work.

Allen Koszowski
217 Barrington Rd.
Upper Darby, PA. 19082

Ted White is taking cheap shots. His column in *Thrust* #16 didn't really give any indication that it was meant to be taken in any way other than seriously. Lovecraft fans lack any sense of humor—what kind of statement is that? Does he know this to be fact? A cold hard fact? Can he name names? How could he possibly know this of all HPL fans? While it is not lost on me that he is parodying Lovecraft's prose style when he writes sentences like "Lovecraft and his silly ilk," it still does not change the fact that his tone was basically offensive. Did he really expect HPL fans to laugh when they read those sentences? I think not.

And lets get on thing straight; Lovecraft is *not* my idol. If I were to idolize any writer it would be Fritz Lieber. Lovecraft, like any other human being, had his good and bad traits. At least he was able to impart a great deal of enthusiasm to a lot of fledgling writers. I do enjoy some of Lovecraft's fiction. However, I do agree with some of the points that Ted makes in his column. It is his attitude that I resent. Nowhere in my letter do I show any disrespect for Ted or his views. The same cannot be said for you. His reply to my letter only reinforces my resentment. Or was I missing the point? Perhaps I am supposed to find humor in being called paranoid. In my opinion his reply only helps to validate the views that I put forth in my letter.

You do not like people to disagree with you, do you, Mr. White? It seems to make you very angry. I think that the only bit of "grubby truth" exposed here is that the paranoia is all yours.

Timothy Ryan
(no address)

I've long been a reader of *Thrust* and found it to be one of the best 'zines in the field. You should have won a Hugo long ago. In any case, here's to your future.

I was sad to see John Shirley and his paranoid critical statements leave; I always found his column to be the most provocative and interesting you published. I didn't always agree with him, but he certainly made me turn to his column first whenever I got a copy of *Thrust*.

Benje Wannover
358 5th Ave.
N.Y., N.Y.

Ever since Damon Knight found it necessary to comment in an interview that "Darrell Schweitzer isn't at all an idiot," I've found nothing but mounting evidence to the contrary. Regarding issue 17 of *Thrust*: How is it possible to quote

a statement like, "It used to be David H. Keller M.D. theorizing that Lovecraft had inherited syphilis from his father," without giving your reader a clue that is scientifically impossible to "inherit syphilis?"

And how is it possible to review a movie like "Scanners" without having some hint that the whole purpose of a special effects movie is to showcase special effects? Nobody but nobody went to see "Star Wars" for its plot.

The ultimate proof that Schweitzer is, in point of fact, an idiot, was an article of his in *Asimov's* magazine on the Clarion and other writing courses. Schweitzer wants to believe that writing can be taught in spite of the fact that his own continuing ineptitude indicates that it can't!

Although "inheriting" is a misnomer, since syphilis is certainly not a genetic disease, I believe it is able to be contracted prenatally from one's parents. Before the establishment of the cause and cure of the disease (and maybe long after) this situation was undoubtedly called "inheriting syphilis". As for Darrell Schweitzer's writing ability—I publish him regularly in *Thrust*; I'll leave it to others to defend him at greater length. > -DDF

Jessica Amanda Salmonson
2127 South 254th Place
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A very enjoyable issue (17) with Bishop dotting on Bradbury and Effinger telling funny jokes and Gallun telling us about himself; and a sometimes informative issue (Sheffield on

agents, as I recently went from a very good agent with whom I had mediocre communications to an agent who is at the top of the field in every respect and has already fired me with enthusiasm, I was interested in another writer's perspective on agents). But the issue doesn't raise many serious questions or issues; it isn't easy base a letter comment on. "Gee, I use to love Bradbury too!" for instance, and so I come away from the issue satisfied, but with a few useful commentaries. Some of the following may seem a bit strained therefore.

I liked your own quick review of *Wizards*. I read *Titan* but felt the story never took itself seriously, crammed with references to such things as "Sci-fi," Frank Frazetta, old movies, especially the Wizard of Oz, and needing to give lesbianism a silly rationale rather than taking for granted that some women are like that yeah they are; so that, though enjoying the book tremendously, there was, afterward, nothing to think about except how silly it was. I prefer to find that high level of entertainment and then, afterward, find that I've been enriched in some tangible fashion, that I have been given something to ponder. Varley's short stories often give the reader something to think about. *Titan* was a cream-puff and I've not been able to work up the tolerance for another sugar-rush from junk-food. If he's start writing honestly from the gut rather than distancing himself, he'd be a lot more rewarding, I bet; but maybe he consciously poo-poos the intellectual and doesn't need personally to be any more serious than right now. If so, I'm sure there'll always be plenty of readers to eat it up.

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